



Avesta of Black and White

## Chapter 5: Feast of Heroes

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### 1

That star is extremely small.

Its surface is enough for just one medium-sized city, and a grown man could probably circle it in half a day. More often than not, celestial bodies of this size are common remnants - useless boulders with only the name left of their stellar status.

This star, however, is an exception. Even if it really could be bypassed, walking around it... no, even existing as such on it is virtually impossible.

Is the atmosphere to blame? Certainly.

Is the temperature to blame? Yes, but not only that.

The answer lies in gravity... This seemingly tiny star has a mass comparable to a stationary star, and nothing compares with its density.

There are so-called neutron stars. When the life of particularly large stationary stars comes to an end, a supernova explosion occurs, scattering them across the universe, but sometimes a frightening "force" remains at the epicenter of the explosion.

So-called black holes... A dungeon of superpowered gravity that doesn't even let out light and turns anything that gets inside into a neutron star.

That's why it can't be called as powerful as a black hole, but if you look at it from a different angle, it's a "star that's still alive". It is not a phenomenon caused by the death of a fixed star, but a life that has been reborn.

Which means that in the entire universe no more rampant living creature can be found.

Compared to the holy realm-like planets on which mankind lives, the gravity on its surface is a hundred million times stronger. Not only is it impossible to stand on it, but even to erect a mountain a millimeter high, and anything that falls within the zone of "its" influence leaves not even a shadow behind. The maddening pulsar of magnetic field, formed from hundreds of turns every second, shines with all the colors of the rainbow, like a crown placed on this celestial body.





The supernatural Star of the Spenta-Mainyu... Because of his overly prideful disposition, this lone luminary once refused even to cooperate with the Nahid, but in power he undoubtedly stands at the top of the ashavan hierarchy.

He may not be associated with the holy kingdom, but as a representative of good he has ruined countless enemies on the evil side. Even with all the Daevas of the first rank gathered together, they will not be able to oppose him, and in the old days he even managed to defeat the king of evil.

That is why the current situation is not normal.

On a land where theoretically no living thing can exist but the indwelling star spirit, a single man sits in a lotus pose with his eyes closed and his hands folded across his chest.

Perhaps he is meditating? Even as the raging magnetic field and the storm of gravity torment him, the man remains calm and unmoved. The stone-like polished body does not receive a scratch - rather, it continues to "grow.

It does not swell or enlarge, but transforms into something denser and purer.

The power of Spenta-Mainyu cannot keep up with someone who constantly increases his own speed and power without stopping for a second. The muscles, designed to prevent the raging spirit from tearing a man from within, serve as impenetrable armor, from which any outside influence will fly away.

In other words, it shows directly that the man inside contains an energy superior to that of a neutron star.

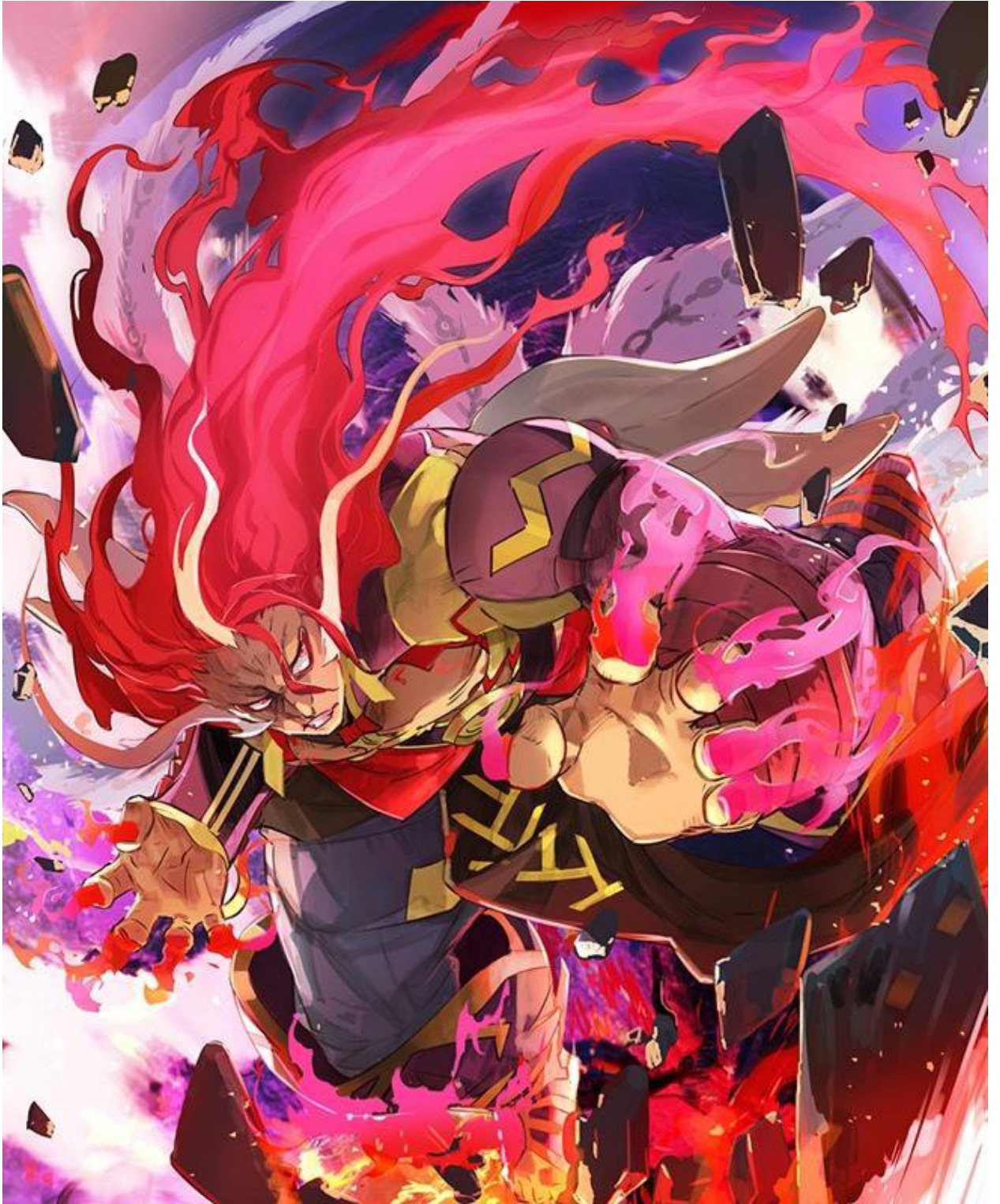
A giant, towering majestically above the rest of humanity. If he stood to his full height, he would easily surpass two meters, but needless to say, compared to the planets, he is as small as a poppy seed.

What kind of living creature could contain such power in such a small body? No, the first question to ask is, what exactly is its power?

The answer is ambition. An unclouded ambition and fighting spirit.

Nothing less than pure entreaty, the dreaming adolescent's pursuit of the mirage of "the strongest.

The man's name is Bahlavan.



He is the third of the seven kings of evil at the top of the Drujwant hierarchy.

And now he is slowly opening his eyes. In contrast to his rough features, there is a certain naivety, even tenderness, in his crimson eyes.

- Show me what you are capable of. You think you can kill me this way?

An incredible fighting spirit surges at the same time, ruffling the hair of the man battling supergravity. Considering that any speck of dust here is heavier than a mountain, this can't be called anything but absurd.

He faced off against Spenta-Mainyu right before he was summoned to the gatha, and at the time their strengths were equal, but after he fought Nadare and the rest of the evil kings, the superiority shifted in his favor. This once again shows how little it takes for Bahlavan to grow above himself.

The Star Spirit miscalculated his rate of development. As a result, he decided to use the same strategy against the returning Bahlavan as he had before the gatha, and wasted no time at all. Any prolonged battle with this man is the pinnacle of feeble-mindedness.

A perpetual engine, ignorant of the very notion of fatigue, this is Bahlavan's true nature. As a reward for keeping his Commandments, by which he always fights to the best of his ability, he gains an endless source of stamina that never runs out.

Therefore, if he can be killed, it is with the first fatal blow. You must gather all your strength and wipe him out at once-it's the only way out. It seems that Spenta-Mainou finally understands that.

- I've been fighting to the best of my ability from the start. Show me what else you can do.

To a call reminiscent of a conversation of love, the starry spirit responds with underlying power. It weaves together not a gift shared with tiny ashawans, but a light of destruction, the right to which is bestowed by the very divine will of the cosmos.

At the same time, the furious storm of gamma rays disappears. Even the gravitational waves subside, and for a moment the star is enveloped in silence.

Bahlavan's eyes sparkle with delight at the splendor before him.

- Well, you're just beautiful.

In his life of carnage, spanning over eighteen hundred years, he has never seen anything so dangerous. With a rippling purple mane of electromagnetic waves, his figure resembles a horse... Wrapped in rampant divine will, he looks down on Bahlavan from above.

He is no larger than an ordinary horse in size, yet he remains a star born from a supernova explosion. Rather, it is in such a compact form that he has become many times scarier.

Truly, he cannot be described as anything other than a beastly deity, and this is the true nature of Spenta-Mainyu. The seething pressure of his life surpasses even the Master of Annihilation, which Bahlavan last encountered seven hundred years ago.

Many ordinary neutron stars still exist, but only Spent-Mainwho managed to attain the form of star-spirit. He overcame death, found new life, and now proclaims the imminent death of his foes while his azure eyes shine with absolute certainty and dignity.

We must assume that he also believes he is the strongest. For this reason, perhaps, their clash must be called inevitable.

- Well done for elevating yourself to that level. It's people like you that keep this game fun.

With a fluidity you wouldn't expect from such a huge body, Bahlavan gets to his feet. Stretching his arms slightly, he smiles lightly at his opponent.

- Shall we do this? Which of the two of us is stronger, me or you?

The King of Evil takes a step forward.

Star Spirit pushes off the ground with his hoof.

They meet each other, look each other in the eye, declare to the world that they are here and now together, which means they can't go on living as long as their rival lives.

This has nothing to do with **Avesta**. It is a different kind of truth, one that emphasizes the fact that only one can survive and experience the sweetness of victory.

And therefore words are no longer necessary.

With a gamma pulse that could shake the galaxy itself, the Spenta-Mainyu rushes in. The energy of the brightest glow in the universe surpasses all the light that motionless stars emit in their lifetime. A direct hit would doom and destroy even stars tens of thousands of light-years away.

And even this is no more than an unintended consequence of its deed.

The real threat is the charge from the supergravity-assisted ram. The manifestation of his power as a stellar spirit, Spenta-Mainyu is even capable of momentarily trampling a black hole.



Precisely because he is a personality-possessing organism, his will is enough to break the cause-and-effect relationship of the laws of physics. "Incomplete, therefore inferior in power to a black celestial body"-this kind of logic does not apply to him.

Even as an ashavan he is lonely, unapproachable. The Commandments forbidding the possession of companions, in exchange for the loss of emotion, grants Spante-Mainu unprecedented power. Even if there were any other yazata here, the star spirit would probably not even consider it, putting all his strength into his hooves.

He originally possessed a fierce, merciful soul, which means that such power can only be gained by worthy determination. The price is by no means small.

- Hn-n-n-n-n!

All this pride Bahlavan takes face to face. It is hard to believe, but he continues to stand on his feet even after the Spenty-Mainou ram hits him square in the chest.

Of course, he is not left unscathed. The King of Evil's body, as if cast in a super-dense alloy, is covered in burns, and the gushing jets of blood dissolve in the vacuum of space.

Yet he does not retreat.

The force of the attack that Bahlavan is experiencing is already impossible to measure, and yet he does not take a single step back.

It also defies all common sense. The will of a man running after the dream of the indestructible and immortal, of a life without a single defeat, currently stands at the top of the hierarchy of living beings.

It is unknown whether this will actually allow him to seize the throne of the strongest. Even if he succeeds, it is hard to say how long it will take.

At the very least, however, there is no one whose strength is greater than Bahlavan's. Not Khvarenah, not Nadare, not even God himself-no one can break his spirit.

- I owe you a debt of gratitude. You have made me even stronger.

No exaggeration, Spenta-Mainyu is a formidable foe. Objectively speaking, he is superior to the Bahlavan he was a few moments ago.

That the battle ended this way anyway has an explanation so simple that only a complete fool could come up with it.

The crisis is a good thing. Hopelessness is a favorite hymn.

The hopeless battle becomes the detonator that awakens the third king of evil.

The perpetual engine that knows no fatigue becomes stronger the more dangerous the situation.

Truly, he is a real monster. It is as if this man was born for one purpose only: to fight.

- Farewell. I shall never forget you.

He raises his fist, in which he puts all of his strength, and then, with a battle cry, he brings it down. Compared to the divine will of the Spenta-Minhu, it's an incredibly simple blow, and yet the concentration of pure destruction shatters the star-spirit's head along with the core of his being.

Spenta-Mainyu, falling to the ground, dies before he can even utter a dying cry. At the same time, life leaves the star, and it becomes an ordinary boulder. In the near future, it will probably turn into space garbage.

Meanwhile, Bahlavan, who has deprived the universe of another shining light, is already thinking of his next target. The memory of his formidable rival still burns in his chest, but in the end it is only a badge of honor. He believes that on his journey he cannot turn around, cannot stop, and looks only forward.

In itself, moving to a new star is not much of a problem. The stars, the greatest living organisms in the universe, remember a time when "everything was one," and therefore each of them has the gift of teleportation. By killing many star-spirits, Bahlavan has also acquired this power, and it goes without saying that he is capable of using it as well.

Because he didn't follow Kaikhosru's example and become a star spirit himself, the distance he can travel at one time is very limited, but since his goal is to slay everything in his path, this is no inconvenience to him. Even now, as he gazes at the many twinkling lights in the sky, he scrutinizes each of them, wondering where he should go this time.

As he studies Spenta-Mainyu's memories left in the star, he learns that there must be two other very powerful luminaries not so far away.

Their names are Haurvatat and Amerethat. He ardently wants to fight both of them and turns his gaze to them with an itch-like ecstasy... However, Bahlavan finds them in a very unexpected state.

No, it would be more accurate to say that he "sees them off.

Both Haurvatat and Ameretat are planets that exude enormous volumes of water.

They may seem to be constantly raining, but in fact they have nothing to do with anything so light.

The water temperature reaches tens of thousands of degrees, and every second hundreds of millions of rivers soar upward at hundreds of times the speed of sound. These stellar spirits are not unlike Spentu-Mainya, but it can also be said of them that they will kill anyone who dares to approach them.

And right now they're going out at the same time. One is pierced by a beam of light and the other's skin is sliced off as if in a spiral, but they both let out their last breath. If you consider the distance between them, you can understand that it happened about the same time that Bahlavan defeated Spenta-Mainyu.

It's hard to call it a coincidence, but then what is it, who is to blame?

It seems impossible to find an answer to such a riddle, but Bahlavan does not even think about it. His shoulders tremble with joy, and he utters words full of beastly glee.

- How strong you have become, Zairi, Taurvi... Are you coming here? I am always ready.

Daevas of special rank, Zairiched and Taurvid. Those are the names of the war demons called locusts. It is not easy to explain the relationship they have with Bahlavan.

They are not minions. Nor would you call them comrades. To put it bluntly, they are something of a rival to each other.

Bahlavan has been invulnerable since birth, but that doesn't mean he's known only for his victories. There have been battles in which there has been no winner, as with Khvarenah or Nadare, as well as those in which he has won but failed to kill his opponent.

Zairiched and Taurvid belong to the second category. They once faced Bahlavan and were defeated, but in spite of that, they survived and managed to escape.

And even now they stay close to him and keep up with him, following the king of evil and improving their fighting prowess and strength themselves.

The reason is obvious. It is all to get Bahlavan's head and win his throne. Like him, they are unable to accept the fact that anyone in the universe can be stronger.

As a result, they unwittingly formed the worst of armies. You could say that they were infected by the madness of Bahlavan, and are now obsessed with a similar dream.

Anyone who crosses paths with me will be killed. I, and no one else, am the strongest in all the world.

The tenants of the battlefield do not regard each other as comrades, for everyone around them is just another way for them to become stronger. And so they spare no one, marching through the universe and slaughtering everything and everyone in their path. Only battle and victory matter to them, and this is what makes them so different from the Master of Destruction or the Garden of Bloodshed.

They embody the apotheosis of violence. That is why they are the Locusts of Aeshma's Ferocity.

This is both Bahlavan's middle name and the common name of this army. Since they are driven by the same will toward the same goal, they may well be called one.

It is therefore obvious that internal strife is the order of the day for them, and because of this there are now only three people in the locust pack, but if you look at it from another angle, you can say that in this mad jungle only the most worthy have survived. Both Zairiched and Taurvid have lived for more than five hundred years. They hold themselves at the very edge of what Bahlavan considers their presence the beginning of battle, slyly observing his strength and continuing to improve.

There is no shameful willingness to flee if necessary. They have all sworn that if a battle breaks out between them, it will decide everything, and only want to guarantee their own victory. In a sense, this could be called an expression of their respect for their opponents.

Bahlavan understands that they are like-minded and welcomes them. He marvels at the successes of his rivals, who have mastered the blackest depths of martial prowess for five hundred years, and already wonders if their time has come.

If Zairiched and Taurvid approach him just a little more, just a little more, it will herald the beginning of a battle. The irrepressible power of himself turns into an aura, and the fists of the incarnation of ferocity are already trembling with joy...

- ...What?

The two Daevas of special rank suddenly disappear. They didn't hide their presence at all, much less die.

Teleportation is also within their power, and they've used it to get away. The question, of course, is "Where," but Bahlavan isn't sensitive enough to answer it. Since he specializes in combat, such minor skills remain his weakness.



- Running away... has never been in their spirit. Found a new partner to play with? Hmm, I'm even jealous.

He whispers to himself with loneliness, standing on the remains of a star. Come to think of it, it's been a long time since he's been so lonely.

The cold-blooded rivals who have left him have so far kept a certain distance at all times, and the fact that they have changed their habit clearly means that they have seen the "finish line." In other words, they have found their last target, which will allow them to kill Bahlavan.

Of course, he also wonders what the superstars might be, and he also wants to join them, but since he has no way to follow them, all he has to do is wait. Like a resentful child, the locust king clicks his tongue and sits on the ground again.

Loneliness. What an unpleasant feeling it is. Perhaps it is this boredom that is his greatest enemy.

One day he will fulfill his dream, and after he has conquered all of creation, there will be nothing but endless emptiness waiting for him. How will he live then? What will he oppose this isolation?

- Fha!

What a stupid question. Bahlavan smiles, baring his fangs. There's nothing to think about, it's already clear.

- I will defeat boredom. Whoever my opponent is, I will not lose.

The resounding laughter of the king of evil echoes through the vacuum of space.

Identify yourself, challenge me. I'm not going to run or hide - that's what he declares to all that exists.

This prayer is reminiscent of a love letter.

- How are you feeling? Do you have a feeling that something is wrong?

To this question I mentally answer that everything is fine. Since I've been told not to move or speak until I have permission to do so, even the telepathic communication is more like a note to myself.

- Okay, then. You're full of black boxes -- rather, you're one big black box yourself, so I wasn't particularly sure of the outcome. Chaoma doesn't work well on anything that doesn't have any organics, so it's already weird that it's more or less working on you. And then there's your personal regeneration... It was quite interesting to watch the robot gradually regenerate itself, but to be honest, it looked a little nasty.

It sounds pretty gross, but I have to admit that I feel the same way, which means that all I have to do is keep quiet. The fact that I can't be called a living creature is the plain truth, and the fact that my wounds can still be healed is beyond explanation. If I were a machine or a doll, I could be repaired by replacing certain parts, but since, as they say, I am a black box, this cannot be done to me, so I have to undergo an inexplicably effective treatment that even the doctor himself does not understand.

In fact, my device is quite vile and disgusting.

- Are you angry? Well, I did go a little overboard with the robot. You're still cute, and you have emotions, and you're living a real, full life. We just can't figure out exactly how you're built. On the outside and on the inside, you're just like a human being. Yes, you're some incomprehensible material, and you've got that parent, but that's no reason to get down and belittle yourself. Maybe you could even have a baby... In fact, have you thought about checking it out?

I haven't. It's hard to tell from the wording if she wants my opinion or if she's just mocking me, so I just have to sigh to myself. I've been thinking about it for a while now, but maybe there's something of the mad scientist in her.

- Yeah? That's a shame. Anyway, if you're feeling okay, you can open your eyes, Quinn.

After getting permission, I slowly open my eyes. Considering that I've kept them closed for thirty-two hours, it takes a little time to get used to the light, but both eyes see clearly. The right eye, destroyed by Frederica, has recovered without any problem.

As I lie in bed, a woman in the prime of her life looks up at me with a smile. Dark skin and flaxen hair... A lush and delicate beauty, the kind of woman in whom the spirit of motherhood is strong.

- Okay, then try to talk. You know where we are?

- At the asylum.
- And my name and number? In words and fingers, please.
- The ninth of the twelve lords of the holy kingdom, Mistress of Sahnawak, Mistress Roxanne.

I raise five fingers with my right hand and four with my left, thus representing the nine. This also causes me no problems, which means that the injuries Frederica inflicted are gradually healed.

What else would you expect from the best Haoma owner. Amazing: even I, with my abnormal device, can so easily regain my former appearance.

Since I have real admiration for her for this without a backward thought, I respectfully pronounce her official title, but Roxanne suddenly starts sulking.

- I told you not to call me that. I don't like all that officiousness.
- A...

By the way, it's true. But I do owe her, and besides, she's above me anyway, and I think it's important to keep up the rules of decorum.

- Even your commandment doesn't know how it works. Maybe you need to say the same thing every time.
- Actually, well... Everyone can change their mind, and so as not to make communication difficult, I'm set up to always take new directions.
- I'm lazy.

Roxanne abruptly interrupts my awkward explanation and gives me a new order, pointing her finger at me.

- From now on, you will treat me as an equal, without any second thoughts. And most importantly, you will not call me "Mistress," "Much Esteemed," and the like. And yes, "mistress" is forbidden, too. Sounds like I'm some kind of old lady, I don't like that. The order is effective immediately and has no statute of limitations. Is that clear?
- ...Yes.
- Good. Then let's check it out in front of His Majesty.
- What, wai... That's too much!

I've never liked overly frivolous executives. She may look like Zurvan, but the comparison is still not in his favor, even if they both treat me like a toy.

Her name is Roxanne. Despite her young age, she is one of the twelve lords who govern the holy kingdom, and is considered one of his majesty's de facto and de jure retainers.

This has nothing to do with what is going on, and the subject is quite vulgar, but it is rumored that they are even in a close relationship as man and woman.

In other words, her position is very similar to that of a queen, and if I am forced to address her as "you" in front of his royal majesty, I don't think he would tolerate it.

- Come on, come on, get up. Come on, Quinn.

- No, honestly, for heaven's sake, have mercy...

The smiling but insistent Roxanne won't listen to anything I say.

Unable to resist her, I leave the asylum behind.

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It's too late to say this, but even though I can read other people's thoughts and memories, that doesn't mean I understand everyone without words. People like Magsarion or his majesty have armor that I can't pierce through, let alone Zurvan and his kind with their smokescreens.

But there is another unpleasant sort of people--those who know how to lie. It is not difficult for me to uncover obvious lies, but there are masters in every business... Those who do not see the difference between the truth and a lie can easily deceive me.

It can also be called unsurpassed windiness and enjoyment of other people's awkwardness. That's exactly the opinion I have of her, and since she told me not to hold back, let me leave my comment here.

Roxanne... What a sly fox you are.

- I'm glad you're safe and sound, Quinn. I should express my gratitude, too. Rumors were true about your amazing skills, Mistress Roxanne.

- I told you not to be so nice to me, Arma. I've heard a lot about you, too, and I've wanted to meet you for a long time. Let's just act like friends.

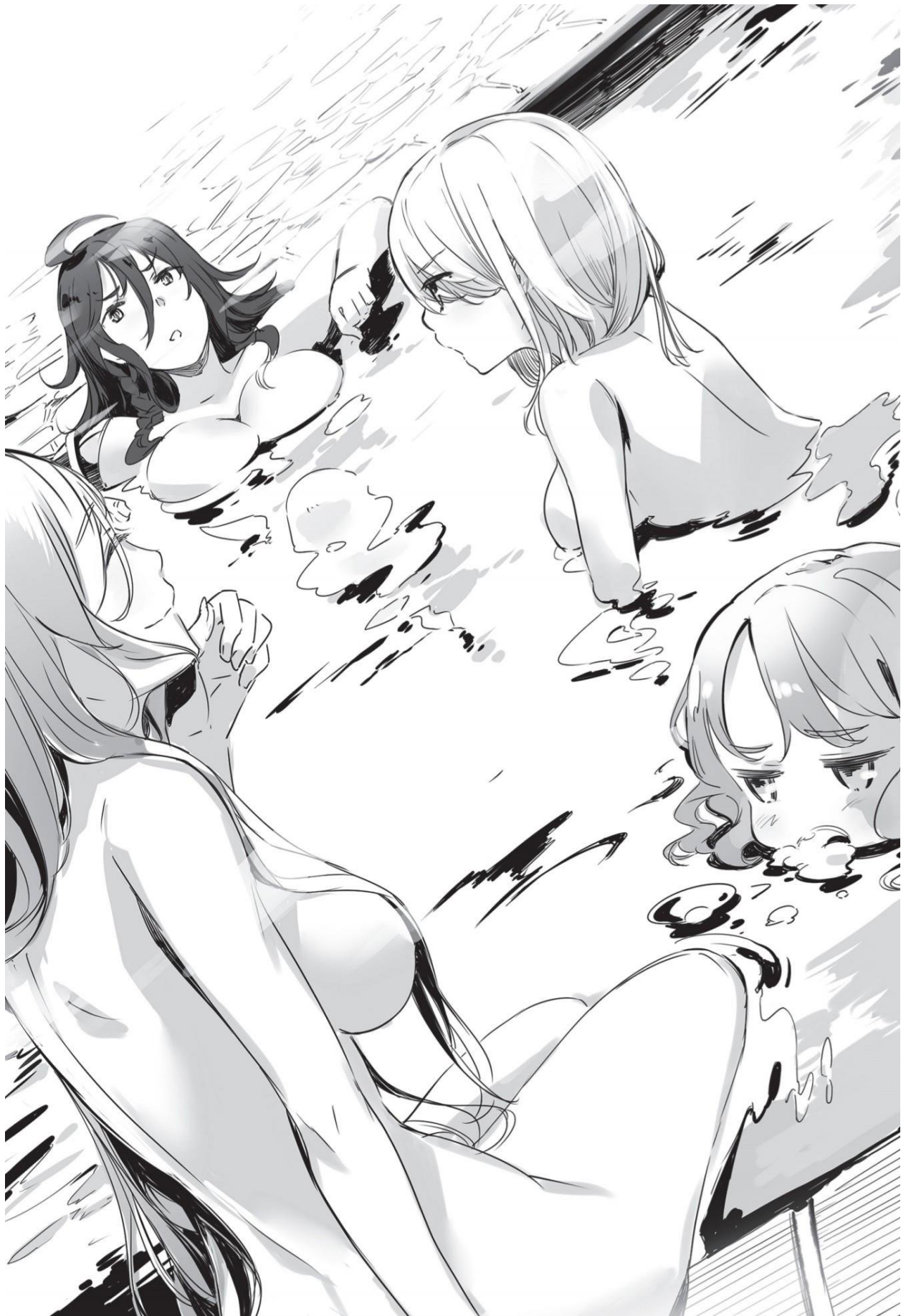
- Arma? But you're still in a high position. I'm flattered that you can talk so casually to someone like me, but I still don't think it's worth it.



- You're so serious... Look, Samluch, does she always act like that?
- Well, I guess... Yeah, about Quinn: something tells me she's a little different than she used to be. Did you do something to her, Roxanne?
- Oh, is that what you mean? While she was in therapy, I decided to give her a bigger boob job.
- ...What do you think you're doing?!

I stand up in the hot water with a splash, and then I swiftly hide from the stares simultaneously directed at my breasts.

What? No, seriously, what? You all have so much dignity, you should be completely indifferent to my breasts. Stop looking at them.



- I'm kidding, I'm kidding. Although I didn't think you'd be so uncomfortable about it. Do you really want to make her smaller? If that's the case, I don't mind.

- Thank you, I don't mind. If it comes to that...

How should I put it... I get the feeling that the longer I discuss this subject, the more stuck I get, so I dive under the water again with an offended look.

You can see the atmosphere for yourself. Four girls are chatting amongst themselves in the bathroom naked. Since I thought that I could not avoid the disgrace before His Majesty, I really feel much calmer here, and yet I cannot get rid of the resentment that I have been dragged here by deceit.

Even though I know that my reaction would only attract unnecessary attention from Roxanne...

- So you don't know what's causing Samluch's suspicions? How interesting. Can you tell me what, exactly, seems different to you?

- Nah, I can't figure that out myself. It's a kind of intuition, so it's hard to describe it in words...

Bubbling out of the water, I watch the dialogue between Arma and Samluch as if it's not about me.

What exactly has changed about me? Unfortunately, I don't feel anything like that myself, so I have to expect anything.

After all, I'd never been so badly wounded before, and my opponent was no different. It would be foolish to expect me to survive this without any consequences.

Was my life expectancy shortened, or were there other invisible symptoms? There's no way to verify that now, so I'll just have to accept it.

To begin with, no Yazata can guarantee their own safety. Even if I worry about the risks involved, there's nothing I can do about it.

- Are you yourself all right, Samluch? I can always be cured, albeit in an unusual way, but that won't work with you.

Not a good time to be worrying about others. Samluch merely laughs dryly in response to this transparent innuendo.

- Fer's gift protected me, and it wasn't that scary after all. It was a powerful blow, but it didn't tear me in two, and I'm thankful for that. It did damage my reputation, though.

- But we were dealing with the fourth king of evil, weren't we? So we can be proud of the fact that we survived.
- That's true, but I'm known for my survivability. What am I supposed to talk about when they can take me out in one fell swoop?

Samluch gritted her teeth, and there was even some embarrassment in her voice. I shifted the conversation to her because I didn't want to be the topic of discussion, but I guess I'd inadvertently hurt her feelings. I was embarrassed myself, and I wanted to be supportive, but I didn't even know how to do that.

Considering that I've suffered far more damage than "one punch," any words would probably sound like mockery.

- You've been struck, backed up by the strength of yourself. Thanks to the fact that we are far away from Frederica now, her effect should subside, but when you first received it, the pain must have been unprecedented. You already have to endure numerous wounds all the time-no wonder you couldn't take it. It's nothing to be ashamed of.
- But basically it all comes down to fortitude, doesn't it? Any way you look at it, I couldn't stand the pain, which means I don't have the fortitude. And anyway, you make it sound like the pain would get worse if I got closer to her. So I have to endure it somehow...
- I guess... But I think you can handle it. So don't dwell on it. If anything, you should feel sorry for me. I couldn't protect the people of Arzang.
- No, it wasn't your fault... I'm sorry, you can't say that, can you?

What should we do? This conversation is getting darker and darker. I understand Arma's regret and Samluch's shame, but I still can't find the words I can say to them.

Before I do something irreparable, I need to defuse the situation somehow. For example, since this is Arma's first meeting with Roxanne, we can bring the conversation down to them...

- By the way, Arma. Where are your feathers?
- Excuse me?

What's she talking about all of a sudden? The change of subject came out so unexpected that we're all left somewhat confused while Roxanne looks at Armah from the sidelines with an extremely curious look.

- Aren't you curious? After all, if they see feathers on her, the mission will be immediately blown, so I've been wondering all this time how she avoids it. I can't find it, I can't find it, it's more like Arma's so flawless, I can't wait... Let me get a closer look at you!



- Wait, what?

Even Arma seems to feel horror at Roxanne's approaching hands. Clearly trying to stay away from her, she responds to her with some rudeness.

- The feathers... Who cares where they are? You think of something yourself.

- Why should I? By the way, I'm a pretty important person. In the name of the mistress of the sacred kingdom of Sahnawak, I order you to give me your seal this very minute.

- Who just said to act like girlfriends?! And anyway, are you sure you haven't spotted her yet? You're a woman, you must know where to hide them.

- I don't know... Say it louder!

- Who are you, Zurvan?!

This is outrageous. Disgusting. She's a drujwant. This harassment seemed so familiar that I involuntarily interrupt them both. As a result, the course of the conversation has changed in one fell swoop, but I don't feel an ounce of gratitude.

And why in the holy kingdom do all the most talented people slip into obscurity? It feels like a real curse.

- It's all girls, what are you ashamed of. Anyway, Arma's feathers are on the...

- Shut up!

I practically take off and cover Roxanne's mouth, and then we start wrestling underwater. Since Arma wished to be helped, I believe this is the best way to protect a woman's innocence.

I want to uphold everyone's chastity. Since our men are so hopeless, if the girls are not more conscientious, we will be finished in many ways.

- Pfft!

- Haha, what are you doing?

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be doing, but I'm glad they're relaxed.

...Well, I can't deny that I had to play the part of the jester at some point, but I'm glad they're more or less relaxed.

- Boo boo, bbinn, bbabda, I bubber bbobo beba?

Just Roxanne's satisfied face makes me so angry that I can't stand it and drop her head to the bottom of the pool one more time.

She herself gave me orders not to hold back or be coy with her, so she's not going to complain, is she?

After we've somehow calmed down, we sit in a circle and continue talking, rubbing each other's backs.

When we sit in a "me → Samluch → Roxanne → Arma → me" pattern, it starts to feel a bit childish, but on the other hand, this ticklish feeling in my soul and body doesn't seem unpleasant at all.

Even if the conversation itself sounds a little strange.

- So, am I getting this right? They want to use us for propaganda with Veretragna as a pretext?

- Yes. I think you probably have something to say about that, but it's also part of your job. The last time the Yazatas survived a battle with an evil king was back in the days of Lord Varhran, and that should be used to instill hope in the populace.

- The logic is clear to me, but it's still pretty brazen. To be honest, I don't really want any part of it.

- I'm telling you, don't be so gloomy about it! All you have to do is dress up, eat good food, and smile. I'll make sure everything goes off to the highest standard.

- Hey, what are you touching there, Roxanne?!

Veretragna, the annual festival of heroes on the anniversary of Lord Varhrán's death and lasting seven days... This event is an occasion of great joy for the entire population of the holy kingdom, and though politically it often involves deception for propaganda purposes, it seems that this time we have to participate as guests of honor. We are being treated as stars of sorts, and, as Arma said, there is a bit of shamelessness in that, but Roxanne is also right that we should be helped with morale support.

Since she deals with public opinion all the time in her position, she is second to none in conducting events. While that doesn't make it any less of a concern, I believe that if there's anything we can do to help, we should do it.

- I personally am not against it. Rather, I'm for it. We may only be bluffing now, but that just means that someday we have to become real heroes.

- And true. What's more, we should count it as an oath and put even more effort into it.

Samluch is back to normal, and I also answer her with a smile. Since the holiday starts the day after tomorrow, there's essentially nothing we can do about it anymore.

- So the return to the star of the dragon's remains will have to wait a little longer, Armochka. You're probably worried about her, but it's safer to wait until things calm down.

- ...Indeed. I have done much wrong as a concubine. If I go back while we don't know if Kaikhosru is back, the older sisters will eat me and not choke on me. The only thing is, Roxanne...

- Yes?

- Please stop calling me "Armochka." It's inappropriate, and why would you want to call me that all of a sudden?

Roxanne responds to such a faithful remark with a genuinely cheerful look.

- In short, a sense of kinship, perhaps? After all, I inherited my father's post about the same time you left for the dragon's star, didn't I? We're about the same age, too, and we've both been given a lot of responsibility at the same time. Besides, we both have to deal with scary kings, so it's kind of fun. So I think you and I are a lot alike.

- By the way, there's a rumor that you and Sirius are in love with each other.

- What do you mean?!

To Samluch's overly frank words, Arma reacts the strongest. Continuing to wash her back, Roxanne only smiles enigmatically.

- I don't know... I'm not at liberty to discuss his majesty's secret affairs so casually. Though I wouldn't expect Arma to have any feelings for him.

- Don't talk nonsense. To me, a king is a king. In the hardest times of the sacred kingdom, he did not abandon people like me, but sheltered and nurtured them. It cannot be that I feel anything for him other than a desire to return the favor. Even if I had to dare to call it something else...

- A kind of respect for a father or an older brother? Is that why you don't like some strange woman being so close to him?

- That's not even the point. I just want His Majesty to be happy. If I may, let him choose a companion, not out of political considerations, but out of true love... Is that true or not, Roxanne?

- Hmm, then let's put it this way. If you tell me what kind of trap you managed to trap Kaikhosru in, I'll tell you everything, too.

- ...Wait, why would you do that? It has nothing to do with that!

They just can't be interrupted, and I'm just stunned into silence when Samluch speaks to me telepathically.

"Hey, what is this, Quinn? It's just awful."

"Yeah... What should we do?"

Feeling hard to describe the pressure, all we have to do is pretend we're not here and keep on washing our backs.

And anyway, it hurts. Don't claw at me, Arma. Any more and you'll rip my skin off alive!

- All right, let's switch. Everybody turn a hundred and eighty degrees.

Roxanne says this when I'm about to scream.

This time we sit in a "me → Arma → Roxanne → Samluch → me" configuration.

Which means that Arma's bloodlust is now aimed directly at Roxanne, but it was none other than Roxanne herself who suggested the idea.

Is this a declaration of war? A provocation? I'm already so creeped out that I'm sitting on pins and needles.

Plus, Arma's back is twitching in front of my eyes, as if from barely restrained laughter.

Once several girls get together, their conversation sooner or later boils down to matters of the heart. Perhaps usually this phenomenon only brings a smile, but today I learned that, depending on the participants, it can mean real hell.

- Indeed, his majesty is a rather charming man. You know, it's not that you can't leave him alone, but his maternal instincts just beg to differ.

- ...I agree with you there. Still, it's very rude to compare a king to a child. You'd rather say he's a virtuous man.



- You're so boring... It's important to see the nice side in every man... By the way, you can't leave Fer in that sense, either. Besides, he is sure to go far, and I want to teach him all sorts of tricks.

Lightly humming some song under her nose, Roxanne says something that would probably make Ferdows himself tremble. She didn't actually say anything wrong, but given her age difference, her looks, and so on, it sounds like a real crime.

- Zurvan is a bit of a bully and clearly has sadistic tendencies-isn't the thought of being with him badly enough to send shivers down your spine? But the main thing, of course, is Magsarion. This menace of his, his mystery makes him seem like a horror movie hero, impossible to resist. Maybe he could even swing me instead of a sword!

- Would you settle for anyone!

Finally, Armah howls, no longer able to contain herself.

Samluch and I, on the other hand, are too stunned by Roxanne's fortitude to pick our jaws up off the floor.

Discussing his majesty's attractiveness is still okay. But to Zurvan and Magsarion?

Her tastes are so inconceivably omnivorous that I say it to myself twice.

- All right, that's enough, have relations with whoever you want. Apparently, you and I can't get along!

Arma gets up from her feet in a burst of anger and immediately walks out of the bathroom with a wide stride. Then Samluch follows her out.

- Ah, well, I'll be going too, then.

Left, or rather abandoned, alone with Roxanne, I literally feel the heavy atmosphere.

- Do you think I went too far?

- ...So you did it on purpose? You can't do that; Arma can't take a joke like that.

Because of her Commandment, whatever love she cherishes in her soul is not destined to come true. She may have chosen this path herself, but that doesn't mean she's fully accepted the idea.

Rather, it is precisely because she cannot come to terms with it that such a strict restriction gives Arma her power. If you look at it this way, she's very sensitive about love relationships, and you can't make fun of that.

- Do you think she dislikes me?

- You really have made her quite angry. If you want my opinion, you'd better apologize to her if you really want to be friends with her.

- Okay, well...

I tell off Roxanne, who clearly isn't particularly sorry for what she's done, but I still think it has in a way relieved Arma of some of her accumulated stress.

Being away from home requires her to constantly hide her true feelings and play different roles. No doubt the hatred coming out of her gut was an important release for her.

This means that after Arma cools down, she might even be grateful to Roxanne, but since the latter might think too much of herself, I don't say it out loud.

- Be that as it may, Veretragna is not far off. However you intend to take advantage of us, please be lenient with us.

- Count on me. Trust me, it'll be great.

Roxanne gives me a thumbs up, and I smile wearily and nod.

### 3

The structure of Veretragna is based on the life of the great hero Varhran and his achievements. The first two days of the festival are devoted to his birth and youth - in other words, the beginning of history. All of this is united by the common theme of "growth."

As such, the main event of these days is the blessing of promising young warriors and a major yazat training with new recruits. According to Arma, they are losing out in quantity and quality to the former holy realm, and yet we certainly continue the call. Moreover, we should strive to ensure that our main force is not made up of warriors born on other stars, whom we find by chance, but precisely of the inhabitants of our planet. Political moves designed to relieve our chronic shortage of hands are made all the time, including appeals to the people.

Indeed, the activities of the young men and women at the foot of the sacred mountain are imbued with such heroism that visitors from all lands who observe them are also transfixed by enthusiasm. The Yazata tutors play the roles of villains, acting out the plot of how Lord Varhran had already defeated a Daeva of the first rank at the age of fifteen. There are elements of theatricality in this, of course, but it is how the narrative emphasizes only the most important things, entertaining all viewers.

Of course, this is not a complete fiction: all the cadets involved in the production are officially admitted to the Yazata, and a solemn ceremony is held on the same two days. Having received such honors to the roar of the cheering crowd, they are sure to become fine ambassadors for good.

Then come the three days of the main part of the feast. As you might guess, they celebrate the hitherto unthinkable victory over the three kings of evil.

But because the deed is too glorious, no one will imitate it so easily, and instead the participants bring back to life the "universal smiles" that Lord Varhran loved more than anything else in the world.

I heard him once say the following: "Everyone plays a major role, everyone harbors a unique story."

Therefore, in order to fill the world with the light that was once Lord Varhran's "sword," there is a general revelry in the city.

In other words, a grand banquet, which is the source of the power that defeated the kings of evil. Every commoner believes, dreams, and prays that it is the universal will for peace that has given birth to a mystical entity named "Hero."

That a new Varhran will be born.

That his legend is not over and he himself is not defeated.

A miracle that lives in the heart of every Ashavan and will one day come back to life...

All pay homage to Varhran, who ascended the greatest "Throne" as an immortal deity, and swear not to forget him forever.

...To tell you the truth, this is the first Veretragna in which I have taken part. Up to now it has fallen on the time when I have been on a mission, and I have heard only hearsay about it.

Now that I have attended it in person, I have to say that it really does look a lot like opinion control and political deception. The common people, unaware of what is going on outside the holy kingdom, probably believe that we are successfully defeating all enemies in our path.

Railey, Marika, the many other people we couldn't save... It's enough to make you think there'll be more deaths in the future, and it makes you sick to your stomach.

And yet... no, that's why there remains that radiance whose purity we must protect, and all those smiles are the perfect embodiment of it. Perhaps I am not powerful enough to save them all, and yet I think I must strive for it.

To finish the work Varhran began and protect everyone's smiles.

I realize again my own importance and that I am obligated to seek with all my might to become part of the miracle.

Finally, the last two days are upon us... It is on the second of these days that we go out.

- Wow, there are even more people here at worst than at the main celebration. How many of them are there?

- As far as I know, more than eight million people have come to the capital now. Even from here you can probably see about a million.

- Oh, yeah, that's impressive. When you're greeted by such a crowd, you really have to wonder if we've won.

The Yazata parade follows the main street of the capital, led by the huge platform on which we're riding. Moreover, because we are standing on a movable hill, our view is elevated to about the height of the fourth floor. Because of this, the spectators called to the "welcoming ceremony" can see us perfectly, and we, in turn, can see them.

I can't say that I can hardly stand on my feet for fear of heights, but I have never experienced so many stares and so much attention, and the fact that they all greet us as heroes is truly overwhelming. Samluch is right: it really does make you believe that we have won.

So the propaganda works as intended. Apparently, even this was planned primarily for political reasons?

- Well, Roxanne certainly did. There was almost no time to organize, and yet she still managed to prepare so thoroughly.

- Perhaps... However, there is also a reason for concern. If the whole structure were to fall, there would be nothing to be happy about.

- Well, we'll just have to have faith in her. Anyway, you're looking a little gloomy. We said it's our job to smile and wave.

From the fact that we are told off by the cheering Samluch people, Arma and I look over and smirk at each other.

At that moment, several cannon shots rang out from behind us like a salute.

- Zurvan... He looks like he's having fun.

- Yes... He obviously likes that kind of thing.

On the front side of the platform stands the women's team represented by me, Samluch and Arma. On the opposite side is the men's team of Zurvan and Fer. The distance between us is no more than three meters, but since a huge sword ornament is placed between us, we can neither approach nor see each other.

And yet it is obvious that Zurvan is having a good time. His mood reaches us as well, and the noise from his shots is unbearable, and even the platform itself wobbles underfoot. You can't help but worry about Fer, who has to endure it all up close and personal, but the main problem remains the last remaining yazata.

I think Magsarion is still doing his bangs as usual right now. It's hard to imagine him taking part in such festivities, and in a way it's only natural, but it bothers me for a different reason.

- What's the matter, Quinn? You look grumpy.

- It's just about Magsarion.

It's no use thinking about it alone. I pull myself together, and I lay my worries on the table for Arma.

- Why did he return to the holy kingdom with us? He should still have his feathers, after all, so why not stay on the star of dragon remains?

Magsarion is a man who will throw himself into an attack no matter how badly he is wounded, just so long as he can move. That he retreated in spite of his remaining strength is unlike him.

I didn't care for it at the time, so I didn't think about it, but now that I can think about it in peace, it's really strange. I asked Armah because I thought his longtime acquaintance might know something, and she actually nods and starts to tell me.

- Common sense is indeed on your side, but Magsarion has an extremely rational mind. Even if his actions seem insane from the outside, in the end it always turns out that he acted as efficiently as possible.

- So he judged it more profitable to retreat? But why would he...

- Well, for example, he might have thought a fight would break out here...

Her flippant words make me freeze in place. Standing to the side Samluch also can't stay away and interferes in the conversation.

- Hey, are you serious? Are those bastards really going to come here too?

- No, I don't think so. As you can see, the atmosphere isn't right for lumberjacks.

With these words, Arma nods toward the spectacle unfolding beneath us. The streets, full of joyful and enthusiastic citizens, really don't look a bit like the sad ruins of Arzang.

It is safe to say that the chances of making contact with the Garden of Bloodshed are almost nil now.

- Besides, Kaikhosru can't find us by smell, either. You've only been on the star of dragon remains for a few days, so the dragon spirit impregnating you won't give him anything.

As for me, as you can see, I am an Ashavan now. I've completely shed the concubine form that Kaikhosru knows, and I'm used to these precautions by now. I am not so careless as to allow an enemy to come upon my trail.

- ...

We can only remain silent as Arma looks us over and continues her lecture.

- In its essence, smell is a connection. In the same way, the opposing ideas of life and death, in their excess, become the force that binds our world and the Garden of Bloodshed.

Life on the star of dragon's remains is only possible with Kaikhosru's permission, and as a result he begins to regard you as his property.



How closely you have bonded with him determines how easy it is for him to find you.

- The connection...

Samluch tastes the word and looks at me. I know what she's thinking, and so I immediately deny her speculation.

- My father cannot come here either. After all, he has stated that he will summon me when I am finished collecting miracles, and he is willing to wait until then. If there is a bond between us, it is through this promise, and if he breaks it, it will be broken as well. And as far as I know, Khvarenah appreciates a logical approach.

- Indeed. Apparently, that's why his majesty accepted you into the Yazaths. Being able to choose the timing of a decisive battle is quite an advantage. If it were only a risk from you, he wouldn't have done so.

- What's the point, then? What possible danger could there be?

I've grown accustomed to this kind of questioning causing Samluch anger, but this time it's about all of us. I'm also somewhat concerned that I can't find an answer.

This makes Arma's calmness seem even stranger: She looks away, as if she doesn't care about the well-being of the citizens...

...when suddenly she laughs.

- I'm sorry. I have frightened you too much. In fact, Magsarion always returns to the holy kingdom during Veretragna.

- What?

When we get that unexpected answer, we can't help but stare at her.

It's Magsarion, isn't it? Every year, without exception?

The truth is so unpredictable, I can hardly comprehend it.

- But-but why?

- I don't know.

I prepare myself for anything, but Arma's answer is so frank.

- ...Well, maybe he's mourning Lord Varhran in some way, too. Maybe he doesn't do it the way we or the citizens do, but at least he clearly considers the day of his brother's death special.
- Perhaps that is where you are really right...

Samluch mutters to herself, clearly not fully agreeing with her. You can see that she's trying to argue, but she can't decide where to start, and she just looks around.

As if trying to get on her nerves even more, Zurvan's cannons rattle again.

- Ah, that's it! Stop making noise, you brute!

Samluch screams in a fit of rage, gets on the railing, and begins to climb the platform. She seems to have decided to go directly to Zurvan and voice her grievances to his face.

I hope he doesn't accidentally shoot her. I sigh and turn to Arma again.

- You could treat people better, too. Don't tease your subordinates.
- I'm sorry, I guess I got too relaxed. I think it's Roxanne, so if you want to complain about someone, go to her.
- I'll tell her. But if you want to express your gratitude to her, it would be better to do it in person.
- Understood. I better apologize to you, too, so if you have any more questions, ask. I'll try to answer seriously this time.

In response to this request, I shut up and think about it. All the while there are more gunshots and angry shouts from Samluch, and I ponder what to ask her.

Indeed, there is one mystery that still haunts me.

- Do you know where Zurvan comes from?

The strange question Magsarion asked that day on the star of the dragon's remains. "Where did you come from?"

What exactly did he mean by that? Of course, unforeseen circumstances had arisen, and yet I regret not asking him about it until now, and I feel that leaving it unanswered would be dangerous.

- Are you sure this is enough for you? The answer is elementary, Zurvan was born here.

- Really?

- I have no reason to lie. We met him when I was about fourteen or fifteen. There were still Drujvantes on this planet at the time. Magsarion and I were just exterminating them when we met him.

Arma tells me everything she knows. About a young man standing in the middle of a scorched village. He staggered like a ghost, but seemed to "awaken" as soon as he noticed the tragedy unfolding around him.

So the Yazaths took him into their ranks, after which he avenged the villagers. In the battle against the last of the scattered mighty daevs on the planet, it was this young man... whose name was Zurvan.

- He's a bit of a character, but Magsarion and I couldn't agree more on his achievements. Especially the ease with which he sniffed out the location of this strong daeva. In a way, his intuition is almost tantamount to clairvoyance.

- Sense...

By the way, Magsarion did have a great respect for Zurvan's instincts. To the point that just a word or two was enough to make him change his usual nature.

It was as if he had decided to follow an extremely precise "compass"...

- I see I still haven't convinced you, but I'm seriously not lying. After all, think about it for yourself. We received the gifts of Wohu Mana only after peace had prevailed on this planet. Which means that when we met Zurvan, no one could have teleported.

- A...

Indeed, Arma is right. After the battle with his father, Wohu Mana was completely exhausted, and he was only able to act again after his new receptacle had been cleansed.

This meant that Zurvan could not bring another yazat, and Zurvan himself could not come here on his own. After all, at that time he was still an ordinary young man.

But then what did Magsarion mean?

- I do not seem to have been of much help to you. That's too bad, but I don't know much more about him myself.

- ...Yes, I'm sorry, too. Anyway, it looks like we're almost at our last stop, so we'd better change our tune.

As a result, the mystery remains a mystery, and I don't want Arma to feel guilty.

After all, our job now is to play the roles of heroes. We have to concentrate and behave so that no one has any doubts.

With these thoughts in mind, I look up to meet the voices of the citizens, united in a common prayer for the future... Perhaps, in one word, it could be called "expectations. Roxanne is not the kind of person who would tell us a detailed program of festivities, but I wouldn't be surprised if we had to address people with an impromptu speech.

Obviously, she has some surprise in store, and since we're almost to our destination-perhaps the royal castle-I should be thinking about my text.

However, the platform carrying us suddenly changes course.

- ?..

Where are we going? Ahead of us for a long time was nothing but a construction site, and the passage there is open only to builders and the like...

- Oh, what the hell is that?!

No sooner had I voiced my doubts than Samluch's surprised voice rang out from above. Since she is standing at the top of the platform, five meters above us, then she must see much further.

Little by little, I begin to understand what it was that Samluch saw. The cloth that had covered the construction site in a thick layer until yesterday has disappeared, and we too notice the building we're probably headed for.

- Roxanne... What are you up to?

Arma whispers under her breath, once again transfixed by her distrust of the cunning rascal. Of course, I feel nothing but misgivings as well.

As I said, I was prepared for the speech, but it looks like there's more to it than that. The great building which I saw was of a rather plain shape, and hence its purpose was not difficult to guess.

Yes, there's no doubt about it...

- So you lied to me after all, Quinn. There it is, there's a coliseum after all!

What are you so happy about, Samluch? I involuntarily clutch my head and just beg her to think about what this means for us.

We're being hailed as heroes and taken to the coliseum... No matter how much you think about it, it promises nothing but danger.

### Chapter 5: Feast of Heroes (Parts 4-6)



#### 4

- It's been thirteen years since this planet became free of the Drujvantes... I suppose the memory of the days before is still fresh in your souls, and many of you still suffer from deep wounds in your hearts. I am no exception, having buried many of my neighbors and even my own father. Not for a moment do I forget that sadness.

However...no, that is why I am sure of the following. Our job is to protect the smiles of children who have not heard of those times, and to lead them to a new future. Meaningless slumber, the pursuit of momentary happiness, cannot form the basis of true peace.

Standing in the center of the arena, Roxanne speaks to the audience around her. Her tone is soft and her speech is not loud, but with the gift of amplification she can be heard by the entire nearby capital.

- So we have the Yazata... Having inherited the will of Varhran, they continue their incessant battle in distant lands. Of course, our situation is unenviable, and we have no cause for optimism, but it is safe to say that their activities continue to bear worthy fruit. Everyone's sincere prayers give them strength, and I sincerely believe that it is you who support them on the front lines.

Perhaps this is what is called a tongue without bones. The Coliseum is filled to capacity and there are nearly a hundred thousand citizens sitting in the stands; the fact that she is still able to read her speech to them at ease is quite impressive.

You could just call it part of her job, and yet the fact that she doesn't show the slightest bit of tension clearly shows that Roxanne is definitely an outstanding person in her field.

However, I certainly have my complaints about her words. While we are listening to the continuation of the speech, Samluch nearby suddenly jumps up.

- No, did you hear that, Quinn? She didn't say a word of specificity!

- Yeah, but she's not lying, either. We really are driven by the desires of ordinary citizens, and whether or not we get results depends on the point of view.

- It may be a work for the public, but at least in this she can be called sincere.

There's a hint of irony in Arma's remark, and I just nod silently in response.

Aside from the fact that we're sitting in honorable seats like heroes, as the organizer, Roxanne is very sincere with the audience, and there's no double-bottom in her words. As Samluch pointed out, her speech lacks specificity, but that's how people can believe what they want to believe.

In short, it's about the purpose for which Veretragna is being held. Gratitude to the population and the desire to protect them are of utmost importance to us, and as long as we talk about it frankly, it will not turn into a farce. Which means that in no way should it be considered meaningless self-glorification.

Even though I agree that opinions may differ on this point...

- Ferdows, I understand how you feel, but try to be patient. I'm not asking you to smile, but at least don't curve so much.

- Yeah, I get it.

Only Fer still looks like he disagrees with what's going on. Even after nodding obediently in response to Arma's remark, his forehead still has deep wrinkles. He looks at Roxanne as if he is trying to pierce her with his gaze.

You can understand what's going on inside him after the words "worthy fruits." Even though I know that nothing is Roxanne's fault, Fer is now overwhelmed with an overwhelming sense of regret and guilt. Which means he probably can't forgive himself.

Marika... Even now, Fer continues to apologize to the spirit of the girl he killed himself.

I thought that upon his return to the holy kingdom, everyone's smiles would help distract him, but in fact they haven't cured him at all, and the storm is still raging inside him. It even seems to me that time has only made his wound deeper.

"Don't worry about him so much, Quinn. No matter how you look at it, it's a problem Fer has to solve on his own. It concerns us, too, after all."

"I guess... I was thinking the same thing myself..."

In response to Samluch's telepathic appeal, I can only sigh in moderation. I wish there was something I could do about Fer's anguish, but I realize that he doesn't expect words of encouragement from me.

- ...This time there are brave heroes among us who have engaged in mortal combat with the king of evil himself and brilliantly repulsed his attack. Unfortunately, they didn't manage to defeat him, but that doesn't change the great value of this achievement. They are undoubtedly the heirs of the great Varhran... Ladies and gentlemen, let's give them a round of applause!

As soon as Roxanne announces this, the air is filled with applause. Only Zurvan reacts with frank smugness to the thunder of applause that shakes the earth itself.

Fer maintains his pained look, and me, Arma and Samluch's smiles look frankly strained. We can't say we've "brilliantly beaten something off," and while I understand Roxanne's position and intent, that doesn't mean we should play along with her quietly. At the very least, we cannot be as shameless as Zurvan.

- The heroic legend is not over. As long as the prayer for peace lives in the heart of each of us, the miracle will happen many more times. And so I ask that you Commandments never to extinguish the flame of hope that burns within you. For it is your will that will be the great force that will bring us victory in any battle.



Completely unconcerned with our attitude, Roxanne brings her speech to a close. This means that we are temporarily out of our uncomfortable position, but there remain gaps in our guesses about the future course of events.

- It's kind of weird, though. I thought we were all going to have some kind of tournament or something.

- Please don't talk nonsense. Anything but that.

I may be telling off the frivolous Samluch, but her hunch is almost identical to mine. Logically speaking, this arena was erected to "show the population heroic prowess," and the last part of the feast is dedicated to "the promise of victory. Just as the main characters of the first two days are the young men and women of the new generation, so the last two days usually focus on experienced Yazuts.

The fact that we are now sitting in the seats of honor is quite consistent with this, but we are essentially no different from the audience. Which means we are in no position to fight.

- However, this is an arena, strange though it may be. Surely we're going to be entertained by someone shedding blood here. What does your gut tell you, Zurvan?

- People aren't your detectors. My nose only works on drujvantes anyway, and that's not my department.

Zurvan tries to wave us off, but his eyes shine like a child's. As always, it is not easy to read his thoughts, but there is no doubt that he is having a good time.

And experience tells me that anticipation of Zurvan never leads to anything good.

Who will fight whom? There's no way of knowing, and that worries me.

No, perhaps it's the fact that I actually understand it that worries me.

- But by the method of elimination, there is only one answer. Who isn't here right now?

As annoying as it is to me, Zurvan's hunch hits the mark.

- Surely he is the Yazata of the Yazata that has become more famous in the present holy kingdom than anyone else.

Let me introduce him to you... Magsarion!

- ...Agh!

That name takes my breath away. Arma, Samluch, and Fer are all astounded except Zurvan, and everyone's attention turns to the arena.

Indeed, he's the only one left, but I didn't think Magsarion would agree to put on a show in a place like this.

And yet I see with my own eyes the black knight emerge from the gate. Not only his appearance, but the fierce flame of rage that continues to burn within him leaves no doubt as to whether he is a double.

- I suppose some of you already know that Magsarion is the younger brother of the hero of Varhran. Having inherited the posthumous will of his great kinsman, determined to move forward in the name of justice, he certainly deserves our admiration. Let's give him another round of applause!

- It cannot be...

A discouraged whisper can be heard from Arma's side. To her, who has known him longer than anyone else, the sight looks even more absurd.

The hero's younger brother. The great kinsman. In the name of justice. All these words seem to me to be a huge minefield from which we cannot escape. Perhaps I can only guess at the exact feelings Magsarion has for Lord Varhran, but he simply can't like the way others discuss it with an omniscient air.

Moreover, even from here you can sense the indescribable bloodlust he feels. Both to the audience and to Roxanne, he turns a hatred that is no different from his treatment of the Daevas.

And yet he does not move. Magsarion, who would never tolerate the atmosphere here, stands at attention while anger still burns within him. The whole thing feels like a bad dream - simply put, it's not normal.

- Even he can't shut up a crowd like that, can he? No, of course I can't call it anything surprising... Hmm, but I'm still a little disappointed.

With a somewhat disgruntled look, Zurvan mutters to himself and snorts. Not counting his inappropriate complaint, judging by the state of affairs, he's quite right.

Normally even the most hardheaded philistine senses the danger it poses, but the tens of thousands of people lined up in the arena are excited to the extreme and have no idea they're

standing on thin ice. As Roxanne asks them to do, they greet the "new hero" with a storm of applause.

This means that even surrounded by so many people, Magsarion remains misunderstood by no one.

And I find that sad to say the least.

- Well, he's not just dealing with the masses here, who have nothing but numbers to brag about. You might say it's his brother's ghost, and that's a serious contender.

- Do you think Magsarion is standing there to challenge Lord Varhran's authority? Why would he?

- It's a hunch, a hunch. You brought it up, so don't bark at me like that, Arma.

- I'm sorry, I didn't mean... Still, a ghost, then?

An idea called "Hero." A challenge to "all" who espouse it. If this is what Magsarion's purpose is, he can indeed be understood in some ways.

Lord Varhran remains an insurmountable wall, not only for him, but for all of us, and we should not only praise him forever. To the extent that we cannot be content with a position in which we need Veretragna. I think until we become true protagonists, victory will remain elusive.

However...

- Are you saying that this is the same reason why Magsarion drops by every year for the feast? It doesn't explain everything, but it sounds realistic.

- Yes, that doesn't answer all the questions.

Who is his opponent?

Without a physical target, there is no point in the arena. If Magsarion came out here to face someone comparable to the ghost of Lord Varhran, that's for sure...

- I tell you, use the method of elimination.

While we are afraid to even breathe, Zurvan laughs, as if tired of us. At the same time, Roxanne says the name out loud.

- I suppose no one is as worthy of the title of hero as he is. Ladies and gentlemen, please rise. The king of all Ashavans... His Majesty Sirius has honored us with his presence.

Once again the air is shaken by applause, which can no longer be called anything but obsession. We, on the other hand, cannot even move.

We have it all figured out. Even before Zurvan or Roxanna said it, we knew that only His Majesty Sirius deserved to be here.

This is a kind of clash between an old hero and a new one. Which means that both sides must know Lord Varhran personally, or there would be no point.

This course of events is all too obvious, and that's why it's so hard to shake off the feeling that it's just not conceivable.

- What nonsense...

Fer speaks in a voice like he's squeezing that hiss out of him. Following him, Samluch looks around at us with a look of horror and asks us:

- Hey, are we sure we should let them do this? Shouldn't we stop them?

Magsarion is incapable of staged combat. Indeed, even now he is absolutely serious, and from the looks of it, this is just as true for his majesty who has entered the arena.

This is no longer a joke. What would happen if the leader of the holy kingdom and the trump ace yazat decided to kill each other?

What are you thinking, Roxanne? And why did they both agree to these terms?

- Lord Varhran's tale began the day he crossed blades with his majesty Sirius in the days of their shared youth. There is no need to talk about it now, for you all know it as the prologue to a great legend. However...

His majesty draws his sword from its sheath. Magsarion responds in kind and raises the massive blade, rusty with blood.

- None of us witnessed the glow of that day. The glorious encounter we were told of before we went to sleep, the beautiful day that launched a precious dream, could not be shared by all of us in its entirety. And so, here and now, we will recreate the greatest tale, composed by king and hero, and become participants in a new legend.

To make the hearts of the good beat faster, to reach a world where no one has to shed a tear.

To behold a miracle like a child's fairy tale incarnate.

"In the name of the sacred wings of Wohu Mana"... As if taking these words as a tentative sign, the two sides rush at each other.

- A flawless epilogue is the future that awaits us. That it necessarily exists, I believe with all my heart.

## 5

The shudder of the clash shakes the arena to its core. Sirius and Magsarion, crossing blades head-on, are deadly serious. They are both prepared to take their opponents' lives without a moment's hesitation and do not even think about how to make the fight more interesting for the audience.

Despite this, the audience's excitement still builds up far too quickly. Most of it is far removed from the ugly side of war, and their inability to distinguish a show match from a fight to the death is understandable, but for ashawans they behave somewhat intemperately.

Indeed, one aspect of human nature is the fluttering of the heart at the sight of bloody carnage and the attraction to the idea of death. But conscience also makes one so, and they must be aware of how fragile the good can be.

The fact that things have turned out this way anyway is surely a result of the influence of the setting. A new hero and a sacred king pull the people out of their everyday lives, beckoning them into a world of illusion. Frankly, the people have never participated in such a celebration, and in their battle they see the legend of Varhran.

No one can decide now whether to accept it as a natural situation or condemn it as an anomalous distortion.

Or perhaps they are fighting precisely to find the answer to this question.

- My king, you are free to do the rest as you please. Allow me to observe you as one of your subjects.

Roxanne, who is directing the proceedings, leaves the stage with a whisper. Now only Sirius and Magsarion remain here.

Continuing to stand in the center of the arena with crossed blades, they only look into each other's eyes and do not move. In complete contrast to the pandemonium swirling around them, they form a calm scene that resembles a picture taken from the pages of a book. There is a kind of dignity in this, and it seems that even if this lasts all day, there is nothing surprising about it.

However, the equilibrium is immediately shaken.

As expected, it is Magsarion who is more stubborn. Living for nearly fifty years, Sirius is unable to hold his own against the cruel knight's youth for eternity. Under pressure he lurches backward, and at a new angle the pressure only increases.

If this continues, he will be cut in two along with his sword. Just as this begins to seem inevitable, Sirius's blade slips smoothly sideways. You can't say he was pushed away by Magsarion's strength: rather, he used it to wrap his entire body around his axis and get behind his opponent in an instant.

All the yazata watching the battle can't believe their eyes. Sirius' movements are not that unusual: in the end, they are just the basics.

Anyone who is going to fight daevas, many times superior to ordinary humans in brute strength, should learn at least a couple of soft moves-it's nothing more than common sense. Which means that all of them can also probably repeat what Sirius just did.

There is suspicion, however, that they cannot do it with the same precision. The movement, which at first glance uses the basics known to everyone, is surprisingly precise, flawless, leaving no chance to respond.

The embodiment of fluidity, so perfect and correct that, on the contrary, it begins to seem absurd. People may be accustomed to calling such actions "by science," but it is worth it for someone to do so, and no one will be able to repeat it after him.

- Still so incompetent. You don't seem to have changed.

Holy King Sirius... The man who was once the hero's loyal companion makes a horizontal sweep, as clear as a mountain stream. And the swing itself, and even the feel of his blade's flight, the immaculate beam makes it feel nothing.

Magsarion dodges the blade at the last moment, which feels as if it is drawn to his neck. He falls and rolls over with his whole body, as if the exact opposite of Sirius, and sloppily increases his distance, raising clouds of dust to shield himself from the next blow.

This beast-like act, which lacks the slightest bit of showmanship, elicits a great deal of booing from the audience. But those who know the black knight in any way understand.

They understand that any action by Magsarion always leads to an attack.

- Saam, Fraward... Kamangir.

He swung his sword, and a black wave flew from its tip. The decapitating blow, which became an arrow with the gift of flight, approaches Sirius with guillotine speed.

The destructive wind bursts through the veil, a deadly blade that could well be described as a threat incarnate. Moreover, there is a far more serious problem here.

They're not fighting in a heath or on a battlefield. Employing such a move in an arena with a hundred thousand people watching, the consequences could be unimaginable.

More accurately, evasion would lead to serious tragedy. This means that there is only one path open to him who calls himself the sacred king, and it seems that Sirius' fate is sealed.

Yes, from an outsider's perspective.

- No more useless tricks.

The howling wave comes closer and closer, but the king only points his sword at it. The gesture is so simple as to seem careless, but the black wind parted before Sirius and dissolved like mist. Like the darkness of night disappearing in the morning sun.

- What do you take me for? Show me your own power.

He is the one who distributes the star spirit feathers given to each of the yazatas. Which means he can easily neutralize their gifts, and even take the feathers for himself by force if he wishes.

Consequently, Magsarion's favorite tactic against Sirius is useless.

- It can't be that you can't do anything without feathers. Or would you rather be a beast of prey at someone else's expense?



The king's quietly alternating words are devoid of any emotion, so it can't be called provocation. But there is a strange weight behind them, and they echo through the arena, not to be missed.

- I do not need you to forgive me. But I want to spare you your regrets.

It is my duty to Varhran.

- That's how you speak...

In that moment...

What do you call the state that Magsarion demonstrates? His face remains hidden behind his visor, unseen, and yet the wave of emotion that spreads everywhere with frightening speed...

Perhaps... it should be called joy.

*- I can hear the beating of a brother's heart.*



Like a curse, like an evil eye, from the very bowels of the earth comes a murmur, and the world changes.

Not a gift or a Commandments, but something beyond the fate of creation that can only be called a grotesque distortion.

In the space around Magsarion, the very rule of the universe breaks, goes mad and boils over.

In the way it changes common sense, it is like the power of itself. But this rampage has a "depth" that cannot be driven into such a framework. If there is one thing we can be sure of, it is that even he himself is incapable of controlling this power.

That's because Magsarion, for all his disdain for danger and morality, has never used it. It's probably safe to assume that he can't even use it of his own free will, much less keep it in check.

And now this violent anomaly was unleashed by Sirius' hands. The black knight slowly thrust his right hand forward, the implications of this gesture unbelievable.

- ...Agh!

Sirius is drawn to Magsarion. No, that space separating them seems to vanish in the blink of an eye - there can be no other explanation.

And assuming that's how it is...

- Oh, so that's who you are?

Sirius, who was momentarily facing his adversary, was not foolish enough to parry the blade aimed in his direction with a blow of his own. The recent skirmish turns inside out, and this time the sacred king is forced to dodge a roll.

He cannot escape, however. With a swing of Magsarion's sword, space disappears again. So distance is no longer of any importance, and the strange teleportation repeats itself over and over again.

The arena, close to a perfect circle, begins to change its shape, curving and adjusting to the disappearing space. No, not just the arena-the city, the country, the continent...

And even the planet itself is being obliterated by Magsarion's slashing blows.

He slaughters the universe. On an extremely small scale, only where his sword reaches, but he is undoubtedly a genocide of the universe.

Both the principle and the cause of it remain unknown. But it is impossible to defend oneself against this diabolical blade, the pinnacle of destruction that cannot be countered. Something beyond human comprehension - or perhaps worthy of being called an act of the gods.

And yet, Sirius...

- What a sad sight.

...This time he doesn't duck, but instead takes Magsarion's charge in the forehead with his own blade. As if to say that to call it absurd is only to sign away his own laziness.

It shows that if someone can achieve "it," others are capable of it. Sirius is a man who also does not know when to stop.

- I recognize only one man worthy of a place in the immortal chambers, and that is Varhran. I suppose you agree with me on that.

Having repulsed the attack, he immediately launches a fierce attack. Sirius' sword flutters just as casually, but unlike Magsarion, it doesn't produce any anomalies.

No, does it really?

At the very least, there is no doubt that Magsarion's attacks pose an unimaginable threat. The slightest movement of his destroys the entire world, and even now the entire arena bends with a creak around him.

Yet no one feels fear. Not that they are not fleeing - they are not even screaming in terror. The spectators only continue to cheer the participants in the bloodshed unfolding before their eyes.

Even assuming that they all rode the wave of excitement, there must be a limit to everything. And so it is now clear what is the reason for this fervor, which seemed inexplicable from the beginning.

Unconcerned about their own lives or the lives of others, capable only of reveling in ignorance, shameless. It is also an anomaly that transcends the present fief, changing the shape of the world itself.

Assuming that its source is Sirius...

- We are both mere fakes. Running after the shadow of Varhran, resisting in the most unsightly and ugly way. We may have achieved this result because of it, but tell me, is there any cause for pride in that?

A falling royal ray sheds blood. Magsarion, wounded in the shoulder, flies backwards, and the two rivals face each other.

Paying no attention to the fiery applause, the hero's old friend smirks bitterly.

- There are those among the Yazata who chant you as a faithful follower of **Avesta**, but I have no words to describe their folly. Let me guess what you are thinking, Magsarion. You feel disgusted, as if in the arms of a mad mother-the whole world is wrong.

Perhaps for twenty years its prayers have desecrated the holy kingdom to its foundations.

Even now, at this very moment, they become a hegemony of thick anger and sprawl wider and wider.

- Albeit in an unsightly, distorted form, you and I do not belong to that fiefdom. And so there is no reason why we should fall behind those who blindly follow **Avesta**. Why did you let some wretched strangler get away? Why am I still unable to avenge my friend?

Magsarion gives no answer and still stands silent. But Sirius continues without much embarrassment.

It is as if he is absolutely certain of an idea they share that defies common sense - precisely because both know their own kind, both have suffered the same fate, both are a pitiful sight.

- It's all the fault of regret, Magsarion. You still regret what happened, and I am unable to shake off my pity. We can't decide what to do, and until we put an end to it, we can't rise above the curse of the mad mother. The fact that we can't even pull off this worthless trick, which can't even be called child's play, is the clearest proof of that.

- And what do you suggest...

Once again the blades collide with each other, and the men are once more in a delicate balance. Responding to the very soul of Sirius, Magsarion finally opens his mouth.

- What can you do? A miserable old man who keeps praising my brother, drunk with pity for him?

- That is why I feel pity. Ah... Now I know exactly what we looked like in your eyes at that time. Despicable scum, not even fit to be fed to pigs. I have resigned myself to the idea that a foolish ruler like me is only capable of rotten rule. And so...

With force on his sword, and yet with frightening calm, Sirius declares:

- I wish to cast aside shame. To finish the unsightliness of my own counterfeit, to create a heartless world that knows no regret or pity.

- ...

- In the end, I will leave no trace of your regrets. I will bring Varhran back to life.

The core of the ideal that the sacred king cherishes in his soul collides with the curse of Magsarion, and the outlines of his desire, as if in a shadow theater, are nothing more than the insanity of a madman.

In a world where the hero is not destined to return, neither of them is capable of changing the past. They understand this better than anyone else - and deny this truth more than anyone else.

The lament for the past, born of love, can be understood. No matter how insane it may have turned out to be, the longing for the lost warmth is understandable.

But the feeling they share at this moment cannot be described in that way.

It feels like a hideous, majestic beating, impossible to look at without pain.

- And you think that's enough to make me obey?

- Everyone has a vocation. You will slay the unenlightened, and I will set the stage. The necessary conditions are finally beginning to be met, which is why I wanted to take this opportunity to talk to you.

- ...

- You yourself answered my call and came here to evaluate me, didn't you? Isn't it because you also, in your own way, smell the omens?

- ...

- Answer, Magsarion, for I am also your brother.

The king's speech is perfectly calm, but he will not forgive me for evading an answer. The furious warrior is silent for a while, but...

- ...All right.

Soon he mutters quietly in reply, draws his blade away, and turns away. The enigmatic distortion is gone, but there is as much weight in his words as in his companion's.

- I don't know or know how to do anything but kill anyway. I'll take out all the scum without a trace. But if this heartless world of yours does not please me, I will kill you anyway, Sirius.
- Let it be. My life has no meaning. All this is but a heartless oath that I will present to my friend. It is a miracle.

At this, Sirius also turns his back on his opponent. The sudden finale causes the audience to be somewhat taken aback, but soon there is a timid applause, which turns into a thunderous ovation.

The shouts of elation that fall upon the deserted arena rise to the heavens, and they echo through the neighborhood without end.

None of them understand anything.

The meaning of the phenomenon that took place here that day has not been fully understood by a single living soul.

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- Bhaa!..! Hey, are you guys glad it ended well?
- Yes... However, I have the feeling that I have lost several years of my life.

After Samluch, I sigh with relief as well. When Magsarion unleashed his Star Spirit, I really feared the worst, but I'm glad that the rest of the fight was a normal duel. It's hard to explain its abrupt ending, but I didn't really want it to end in death, and that's the best possible outcome.

- And yet King Sirius is strong. I didn't even expect him to be.
- Of course you didn't. He's a loyal friend of Varhran himself, remember? I bet he's been through more battles than we could ever dream of.

Fer may look annoyed at the words, but I understand that inside he's just as pleased with what's happened. Of course, I wasn't expecting this at all either.

I have heard that his majesty stands on a qualitatively different level in battle, but he is no longer young, and he has not been on the front lines for a long time. The fact that he still showed such honed skill came as a real surprise, and his dedication inspires only genuine respect.



There is just one "but." There's still something about him that's a little off-putting.

- But Magsarion, of course, had gone too far. He was so scared of the king's blows, he was the first to buck his tail.

- Actually, it didn't seem that way to me. Rather, I'd say his majesty went along with Magsarion. After all, they were determined to kill each other. To be honest, that doesn't sound like him.

- You think so? His Majesty is human after all, he couldn't just take out his accumulated anger on Magsarion?

- That's what I'm saying, His Majesty isn't petty enough to kill his subjects for such a petty reason. Don't judge others by yourself.

- Now, Fer, what did you say there? You always have to blurt something out when you're not asked.

Watching from the sidelines an argument that was already turning into a quarrel, I just sighed wearily.

Just as they said, having His Majesty engage in mortal combat did seem strange to me. Such a competent ruler would be unlikely to follow through, even if it were against Magsarion.

Moreover, purely ideologically, His Majesty has developed a reputation for always taking the hardest path alone. That he still stooped to the level of his opponent, whether out of hatred for Magsarion (as Samluch believes) or out of an inability to resist his will (as Fer believes), does not make him look good in any case.

I myself, however, find it difficult to answer what that might be.

- It's just such a promise. He wanted to kill Magsarion so he wouldn't kill him.

Suddenly Zurvan's voice comes from outside. It is so sudden that we cannot understand what he means, and we involuntarily look at each other.

- What are you talking about?

Fighting to the death not to kill is a contradiction that makes no sense. Some kind of newfangled riddle, perhaps? Despite my desire to hear the answer, Zurvan merely smirks and passes it off.

This time, the impatient Samluch turns already to Arma, and the latter sighs and answers her.

Her words are no less puzzling, however.

- Do you know why Magsarion keeps one feather in every situation?

- A?..

None of us can understand her, and we are only more confused. But unlike Zurvan, she is a straightforward person, which means there must be some sense in it.

So I try to think about her question, even if I don't know where it leads.

- Speaking of which... It seems to be true.

- Even in Railey's village he actually kept one feather.

Samluch is right: that time Magsarion did say he was out of feathers, but in fact he wasn't. He didn't use the help of the Yazaths who came for us, but teleported to the holy kingdom on his own.

He didn't start acting like a lone wolf yesterday or today, so it didn't surprise me enough to mention it out loud, but if you think about it, it's really strange. It's hard to imagine that, in his own rational way, Magsarion would act senselessly.

In that case, what could it be?

- Perhaps he can't participate in mass teleportation for some reason?

- Exactly. Most likely, Magsarion cannot touch others.

- More accurately, except for the killing.

When we hear this answer, we all make eye contact.

So they're saying it's a commandment taken by Magsarion, still surrounded by a halo of mystery...

- Commandment...?

- In the end, it's just our guess. Though I don't think we're wrong.

There is a certainty in Arma's nodding voice, and I suddenly feel a chill and my head begins to go round and round.

A Commandments forbidding any physical contact other than killing... a Magsarion cannot touch others without wanting to kill them, and he can only be touched by those who want to kill him.

In that case, mass teleportation requiring bodily contact is really not an option for him.

- In short, even a reassuring pat on the shoulder will kill him. No handshakes, either. No hugs either. Anything with a girl is out of the question. All this would be considered a violation of the Commandment.

- That's why His Majesty was serious about finishing him off...

Even Samluch, whose Commandment also comes with great risks, is clearly shaken to her core. She is quite understandable.

If Magsarion really did accept such a Commandment, he belongs to the same category as the infamous third king of evil. Everyone around him becomes a target for him to kill, and at the same time, an enemy who wants to kill him.

All that awaits him is a scorched wasteland with no one left. And standing in the middle of it will be him alone...

- ...a limitation of the worst kind. And what does he get in exchange for such a burden?

- As far as I'm concerned, everyone's bloodlust makes him more powerful. That is, the more the enemy wants to kill him, and he wants to kill the enemy, the more powerful his attacks. Under the right circumstances, he could probably even overwhelm the lumberjacks' immortality.

- A sort of counterattack, right? Maybe he could turn the enemy's power to his advantage, too.

Magsarion's old acquaintances speak so calmly, as if they don't care at all about his way of life. I cast a reproachful glance at them, and though Zurvan only hums to himself, Arma sighs guiltily and turns to me.

- I know what you mean, Quinn. But you know yourself that the Commandment you've accepted can no longer be denied. Once Magsarion's mind is made up, arguing with him won't change it.

- Perhaps logic is on your side...

I'm embarrassed to stop halfway through a sentence, but I'm too hurt that I can't answer her point-blank. Come to think of it, this Commandments is not inferior to Arma in its irreversibility, and perhaps she just thinks I'm naive.

Indeed, Zurvan's next words come as a complete surprise to me.

- That's probably not his only Commandment anyway.
- Oh, really?!
- No way...

Another shock literally paralyzes me, and Fer and Samluch are also clearly concerned about what they have heard.

No one is saying that everyone can take only one Commandments, and of course, it is possible to take several at once. But not everyone will do so: as far as I know, there are hardly any such cases.

Common sense says that several commandments together become much stricter, and the punishment for their violation inspires horror. The **Avesta** suggests that a simple death will not do.

What absurdity has Magsarion condemned himself to, who is already forced to endure an already severe restriction? I would not venture to speculate at this point.

- Again, it is only a guess. In all the time we have watched him, there have been instances that cannot be explained by one Commandment alone.
- ...In that case, how many can there be?

I won't hide it, there's a certain meekness in my voice. Arma pauses for a while, and then answers:

- Two more. Maybe three.
- ...

This time I am completely at a loss for words.

Up to four Commandments at the same time? Probably even stricter than the prohibition of all touching?

The ravings of a madman. Could he even be able to breathe in that state?

- Funny boy, isn't he? That's why I never tire of watching him... Oh, here comes the next event.

Zurvan doesn't even think about my sanity, and whistles as if to draw a line under the conversation. As I look more closely, I see several young girls enter the arena, at the same time as the upbeat, rhythmic music begins to play.

- Uh-oh, and they're cute. That's them, isn't it? The musical group everyone's been talking about lately? Maybe we should ask Roxanne to get us a date together.

- Do whatever you want, honestly.

Forgetting about everything in the world except the concert, the newfound fan in Zurvan's face gets only a tired wave from Arma. Like her, all we can do is sigh.

- Anyway, here's the deal, Quinn. If you want to keep hanging out with Magsarion, you'll have to be prepared for anything. No matter how you look at it, being around him means risking your life.

- ...Yes. I'll try to carve it... in my heart.

As if covered by a sticky feeling of defeat, I lower my head. Magsarion himself constantly rejected my attempts to make contact with him, and things had never really gotten off the ground, and yet I thought that someday things would change.

But the wall between us was much stronger and higher than I'd thought. I couldn't help but wonder what exactly I was supposed to be "prepared" for.

Will Magsarion kill me one day? Or the opposite, that I will have to kill him?

I want neither. I don't want to think about any of that.

I shake my head, dismissing the ominous thoughts of the future, when suddenly I notice something.

Do I wish to deal with Magsarion of my own free will?

Not at my father's command, or out of loyalty to his majesty, but because I want to?

- ...It cannot be.

I cover my mouth with my hands involuntarily. I feel as if my knees are about to fail, and I fall to the floor.

Logically, my main goal should be to win the good. That's why I follow Magsarion out of the crowd, worrying about him, looking at him from afar. I thought that by understanding him, I could get closer to the mathematical equation of the miracle.

Of course, that's exactly what I think now. But if that were all it was about, it wouldn't explain my anxiety.

The mission is more important than anything else. I am driven only by other people's orders. Which means that if I win, I shouldn't care if Magsarion and I die. As a soulless instrument created by the king of evil, as a yazata who has dedicated her life to the cause of good, I must accept my role as a pawn and obey.

Yet I still insist on a future in which I walk side by side with Magsarion. I want to face this dangerous, savage, and utterly frightening man-not out of a sense of duty, but for my own sake.

How long ago? Perhaps I just didn't realize it, and in fact my personal battle began many years ago. When I think about it, everything around me becomes much more frightening, and I look at Arma as if begging her for help.

Of course, she's not even aware of my feelings, and she just looks at the singing and dancing girls with a detached but gentle gaze.

- What beautiful girls... I even envy them a little. I understand that women like me should disappear when they win, but sometimes I still dream about something else. What if a new world awaits us at the end of our journey?

- What do you mean by that?

- No reason, His Majesty sometimes speaks of it.

With an embarrassed finger scratching his cheek, Arma begins a rambling story.

- We're on our way to a flawless epilogue... Remember what Roxanne was just talking about? Apparently, it just can't take place unless people like me find salvation. When the battle is over, the **Avesta** will lose its meaning, and we will all be freed from our Commandments...

- Arma, so you...

Her thoughts begin to echo in my head, and the words fly from my lips.

- You want to save Magsarion?

- No, it's not that... I told you he has his own way, and it's not for us to argue with him.

Arma shakes her head hastily, and then looks at the floor, but I don't want her to feel guilty.

After all, I have a quiet sense of awe for her now.

- I think you are an extraordinarily beautiful person. Both for your prayer and for your very soul.

The idea of a new world she talks about. A person who cherishes such a dream simply cannot be corrupted.

After all, I myself have just worried about my and Magsarion's future, but I haven't even thought about such important matters as life after the war. I realize that, on the level of my **Avesta** instinct, I cannot go beyond the general worldview and subconsciously consider the clear image of victory to be nothing more than a fairy tale.

What a clueless wit I am. I can feel my ears burning with shame, but at the same time it's as if a shroud falls from my eyes.

- Indeed, I think, if the eternal war ends, this world will surely find new life. No, it just can't help being reborn.

And then a horizon will unfold before us that no one has ever seen.

Without the **Avesta** and the **Commandments**, having gotten rid of his instinctive bloodlust, Magsarion will surely strive for happiness as well.

- This is the miracle you see in the victory his majesty seeks. Is that why you are so devoted to him, Arma?

- ...Don't read other people's minds. There is something insidious about you.

She whispers resentfully to herself, trying desperately to think about extraneous things, and as uncomfortable as I find it cute, I smile nonetheless.

- I'm sorry for raising my voice without asking. I've been in therapy for a while now-maybe I'm feeling a little weird.

- Hey, what's all this sneaking around?

Samluch leans in our direction, and I talk nonchalantly to her.

- No reason, it's just that Arma happens to be such a flighty person...

- Quinn! Ahh, honestly, first Roxanne, now you - I'll make you dance!

She sounds like she's really mad. Our mission to the dragonfossil star is still not over, and we have to go back there soon; it's probably not a good idea to screw things up with your superiors.

Though I may be frightened of what the near future holds, the idea of a new world has brought me much joy. Perhaps Magsarion also retreated because he pinned his hopes on his majesty.

After all, if he really were a raging blade, wanting only genocide, he would have killed his majesty on the spot. And since he did not, his nature is not at all limited to bloodlust.

Whatever Commandment he took, he can be saved. Everything can still be fixed.

No, we must win to set things right. Going for a flawless epilogue...

- Thank you, Arma. Thanks to you, my horizons are much wider.

My words are full of sincere gratitude.

Finally, if I may divert you to an extraneous topic - it is said that on the night of the end of Veretragna, part of the arena collapsed. Perhaps it was the result of hasty construction; in any case, I'm glad no one was hurt.

## 6

- We've been informed of Kaikhosru's return, so I'll go first. He may have exposed us, but if I come back with you in the open, the sisters will just eat me up. Better wait three days. After that, I'll meet you in Arzang.



The next day, after noon, Arma gives us this instruction and returns to the star of the dragon's remains. Roxanne, who was seeing her off, was hanging on to her in tears, which Arma was obviously very unhappy about, but judging by the way she didn't scold her much, she must have had mixed feelings.

I'm a little wary of Roxanne myself, but since I don't think the incident in the arena was her personal initiative, I'm not going to blame her for what happened.

Still, I find it strangely irritating that with her connections to the King and Magsarion, she seems completely unconcerned. To tell you the truth, I'm a little jealous of that.

- Gone. And we were just getting to be friends.

- Well, yeah... I guess so.

Despite the fact that Roxanne's eyes were just now wet, right after the send-off she's already holding on as if nothing had happened. If her sobbing was just good acting, you could call it cute, but if it wasn't, it just shows she's got a bad temper.

- Anyway, you have nothing to worry about. She's sure to have Kaikhosru wrapped around her finger.

I overpower the headache, but there is no bravado in my very assertion.

Even though our original assassination plan practically failed, Arma has already proven that she's actually taken the initiative from Kaikhosru. She's still quite capable of pushing his vulnerabilities, and she's even managed to share a couple of concrete ideas with us.

- Indeed, Arma can handle any man.

- Yeah. Well, I've got work to do, so if you'll excuse me...

- Ka-ah, don't go, Quinn! I'm lonely without you.

Roxanne moans after me, but she's basically just doing it for show, and I leave her behind. Disregarding her company goes against my father's orders to some extent, but now I realize that it goes against my personal interests.

In other words, I am now actually acting as I see fit. Now that I know the darkness that possessed Magsarion, I can't tame the feeling.

I feel I must get to know him better.

- Yo, what's up, Quinn? Come to find yourself a boyfriend?

So, when I get to my destination, I meet someone I didn't expect.

- Zurvan... What are you doing here?

At the entrance to the forest, where Magsarion is always training, a familiar wit is smoking a cigarette while leaning against a tree. He looks like he's doing absolutely nothing, but it makes you wonder why he's killing time here and not hanging around town.

Zurvan must have guessed that, because he smirked slyly.

- No, I promised you something. I can't go too far from Magsarion now. Were you on your way to see him?

- Yeah, as a matter of fact...

- Yeah, well, you might want to have a word with him. Since he's been suspended from the business on the dragon's star, he might be stuck here for a while.

He keeps taunting me, and I'm not sure how to respond. Zurvan is right: Magsarion has been excluded from the Arma-led team to counter Kaikhosru.

Since her true identity has been revealed, the mission has become even more difficult and delicate, so this is a natural result. In a situation like this, keeping a bomb of mass destruction on the team is just silly.

But the tone of Zurvan talking about it is so deliberately frank, as if he understands that this is not really what I came for, and it makes me feel somehow disgusted.

Besides, what kind of "promise" is he talking about? Even when I try to find the answer to that question in his head, his mind stays as impenetrable as ever, and the truth remains unknown.

- Don't just stand there, you'll freeze. If you have business with Magsarion, go to him already.

- ...

- I won't disturb you, and I won't peek, either. Of course, I'm not going to eavesdrop either. Come on.

- All right.

He reluctantly cleared the way for me and nodded as I walked deeper into the woods. Of course, his behavior bothers me a little, but on the other hand, his actions have never been explainable as it is, and if he tells me to go, so be it.

Trying to ignore the unpleasant stare that followed, I walk deeper and deeper into the thicket. Not a few minutes pass before I find the one I came for.

I see the lonely figure of Magsarion, waving his sword silently over and over again.

- ...

So, what's next? Obviously, if I just try to talk to him, he'll ignore me, so maybe I should follow his example and start training as well. It would look like a circus, but maybe it would be surprisingly effective.

The main thing is to get his attention, and you can't do that with casual behavior. If I can't even surprise Magsarion, he won't want anything to do with me.

Let him think that I am a nuisance to him. Who cares if he gets really mad at me? I don't expect any tenderness from him anyway, so why should I bother?

- What do you want?

No sooner am I filled with this determination than I almost stumble. As he continues his sweeps, Magsarion's cold voice folds into words.

- I said, what do you want?

- Ah, well, anyway...

Perhaps that could also be considered a kind of dismissive attitude. I had already made such grand plans, and he suddenly broke them all at once.

Looking at the back of Magsarion, who even now does not turn in my direction, but only does what he sees fit, I suddenly feel anger. Since, at my core, I always have to adjust to others, I

didn't even know how annoying it can be to have someone who goes against your own intentions.

- I need to talk to you about something. Would you mind turning to me?

- ...

- Magsarion.

He's ignoring me again. And just now he decided to talk to me out of the blue-that's how, okay, funny.

I realize the blood rushing to my head, but I'm not going to make it go away, but instead I'm taking a deliberately stern tone.

- We ne-ed to t-a-a-a-a-a-l-k!

- What a noisy doll.

At the same time, a sharp whistle of wind is heard. Magsarion turns toward me with a sideways swing, and the tip of his sword rests right on my throat.

- I can't understand you. Can't you all do nothing but hinder me?

- Interfere?

His words are filled with pure disgust, but I am surprisingly cold-blooded. The lust for murder didn't dampen my enthusiasm-quite the contrary.

My head is filled with such heat that, on the contrary, it has cooled. I look him straight in the eye and silently answer a question with a question.

- What, I wonder, are we interfering with? Stopping you from doing more absurd and reckless things? Angry at you for making ordinary people suffer beyond measure because of you? Are you saying you're the one doing the right thing by not caring about others and doing whatever you want?

- ...

- So now you just shut up? That's cowardice. It may be easy for you to think that you have no allies, to build one wall around you after another, but you too are a proud ashawan. What you really want to do is touch others?

- Ho...

Without taking his blade aside, he tilts his head slightly sideways. He asks me more and more questions, as if he were staring at an unknown beast.

- Do you know about my Commandment? Who told you?

- Arma. She must have noticed because you saved her, and she's been watching you ever since. And now she wants to save you and fights to make her torment produce a miracle.

Do you understand what this means? It proves that no matter how much you deny it, you are still not alone.

She told us that the sight of the young warrior continuing to swing his sword even in the midst of absolute despair gave her the courage to get back on her feet. Which means that his life no longer belongs to him alone.

Whatever Magsarion's intentions, the truth is that his way of life did bring light to the people.

- It is our Ashavan duty to put our feelings together so that they can give rise to hope...

I place my hand on my chest and whisper, as if carving each word in stone.

He may be flawed and inexperienced compared to Lord Varhran, but Magsarion has all the qualities to be a messenger of wonder.

- Whatever burdens you, I believe you can connect with the feelings of others. So please open your heart... We want to be with you until the new world dawns, Magsarion.

- ...

My attempts to appeal to him end with him silently drawing back his sword. I am glad that I could convince him, when suddenly I hear some strange sound.

An uneven shudder, the creaking of metal against metal. The sound, reminiscent of a predatory beetle dancing, comes from the black knight in armor standing before me.

Magsarion is laughing... As soon as I realize this, an indescribable chill runs down my spine.

- Arma.

He whispers. Cursing an old friend who thinks of him without hatred.

- Arma, Arma... What do I care about that whore?

- ...Agh!

- She's a pain in the ass. I guess I'll have to kill her after all.

- What did you say?

What's he talking about? As aloof and rude as he is, I've done my best to convey her feelings for him in their entirety.

How sincere do you think Arma wants to save you that she endures unimaginable humiliation to the point of gnashing her teeth?

And you can think of nothing else but to kill her?

- You take that back. I can't forgive you for that.

- Why should I? She's trying to kill me. Naturally, I should return the favor... Ah, I'm sick of all of you. Even worse than my enemies.

With those words Magsarion's sword moves again.

This time it is not going to stop. The blade comes toward me with clear intent to slaughter me on the spot, and I dodge it with a leap back.

- Wait-I'm not going to fight you!

That's not why I came here. I just wanted everyone to be happy.

I wanted to see with my own eyes the perfect epilogue. To walk with you through the new world that will follow...

- Stop it, why can't you understand? Magsarion!

- You're the ones who don't understand.

He draws his sword back and slices the massive tree in two with a single swing. Against the darkness of the forest that shakes the forest to its foundations, the black yazatha involuntarily lets out a laugh that resembles an angry growl.

- I am only venting my anger. I try to distract myself, because there's nothing I can do about it anymore.

The voice is so ominous, so creepy, that I can't really call it self-injury.

- And yet I hear a brother's heart... Ha-ha-ha, Sirius, Sirius! You intrigue me, you son of a bitch, if you really think you can, give it a try. In this world where nothing is certain!

- Magsarion, what are you...

I'm sure I don't understand a tenth of the crazy experiences that lie in his words.

But I can tell you with certainty that his thoughts gnaw about Lord Varhran. That he regrets his death to such an extent that he can hardly keep his sanity.

Because my father killed a universal hero... existence itself was hopelessly broken.

- Forgive me... I suppose you don't like to hear my apology, but I became a yazata out of a determination to take responsibility for my father's actions. If I do my duty, I don't care what happens to me...

- Then die.

- But now...

I barely have time to dodge a series of chopping blows. Even if he commands me to fight him with this, I confidently disregard his command.

Let me break the Commandment with this. Now I am ready to accept any punishment, but I am not going to die.

- I will not leave you so easily anymore. For I feel the prayers of all within me, for among them the feelings for you are blazing! I will not let you die, and I will not let you kill me!

For Magsarion has not yet crossed the final line. I stand completely defenseless and speak to him in such a calm voice that I am amazed at myself.

- One thing I noticed after the recent mission. You still haven't become like Kaikhosru and appropriated the power of the star-spirit, have you? If you had killed Wohu Mana, you could have fought without any restrictions, so why haven't you done so? Why do you deliberately continue to behave so illogically and ineffectively?

- ...

- The answer is that you are ashawan... I'm sure you can be everyone's wonder!

- Talkative puppet.

- What lowly creatures.

- ...Huh?!

When I hear a mysterious voice, I look up to the heavens. I forget even my quarrel with Magsarion for a moment, but I do not freeze in place, not because I am surprised by the unforeseen intrusion.

The voice, which even has a certain subtlety about it, penetrates my gut. The blazing insanity audible in it frightens me to my core.

- I cannot look at a slop like you without disgust. Don't breathe. Don't rummage. Know that the only fate that mortals like you deserve is to be the flowers of doom that amuse me with their withering.

This trembling, this pressure... It all reminds me of the dragon voice of Kaikhosru that I managed to hear on the star of the dragon's remains.

This bile, this despair... The density of the surging power of myself is not inferior even to Frederick's.

- Zurvan!

As if overriding the weight of the threat falling from above, Magsarion lets out a furious cry. The gunner who answered the call, ever carefree and frivolous... this time, on the contrary, he frowns annoyedly.

To me, that seems to be the biggest anomaly of the day.

- ...Goddamn, she's so stubborn. I thought she wouldn't find me for such a small thing.

It was the first time I'd ever seen him muttering angrily to himself, but it made me realize that I was the only one who didn't make sense of what was going on.



Both Magsarion and Zurvan had foreseen this development to some extent. Perhaps that was their unknowing promise...

- Not good, and she's serious, the bastard.

Zurvan looks up at the way the sky suddenly parted. Like a blossoming flower, cracks spread out over the holy kingdom, from which a tree of unimaginable size begins to grow.

What is it... It looks as if another star appears in the planet's atmosphere.

Behind the curving tentacles of vegetation, like a crown of thorns, I think I see a woman's face - resembling a mask of uncleanness, but beautiful all the same.

A hot smell of rot hangs in the air. Perhaps that breath is that of a woman intoxicated with passion.

- I have found you, Zurvan. Thirteen years I haven't seen you, but now you can't get away.

- Shut up, you lunatic. If that's the way it is, I'll go to you myself, so open the way!

- Oh, wait!

Using the gift of flight, Zurvan flies straight for the gap in the sky, and Magsarion immediately follows. I, too, immediately rush after him.

- Well, well, well. You mean you have decided to return to me? Well, so be it, commendable. As a token of my gratitude, I'll postpone cleaning up this slop.

An enchanting laugh breaks out, and a powerful attraction grips us. A fervent desire not to let us go entangles us, and we fall into a woman-like bosom-like celestial fissure.

- What is it...!

- Mashyana.



While we remain incapable of anything but allowing ourselves to be consumed, Zurvan whispers back to me.

Along with an uncharacteristic irritation - and a loneliness that even he is unable to hide.

- My little sister, with whom we once quarreled and broke up.

## Chapter 6: Shameful Sky (Part 1-3)

Translated by [@jasper.fx](https://www.jasperfx.com/)

Here it is, this day is finally here.

I was so tired of waiting that I even lost track of time, but it didn't bother me at all.

I was willing to wait a second, or a million years. That's the only thing that matters, and it doesn't convey a fraction of my determination.

So I feel neither confusion nor fear. I feel a quiet sadness and discomfort, but I believe that this is just further proof of who I am, and it won't stop me in any way.

Rather, I think of it as my wings that will lift me into the air while my heart sings with anticipation.

I will fly to the edge of the world, swiftly, unwaveringly-so that my former cowardice will dissolve into the sky, and I myself will win true freedom.

I will finally meet you. This time I will not be stubborn, but will look you straight in the face with confidence. Then I will declare my feelings for you.

Oh, I love you. I love you with all my heart. Ever since I was not even born, for a long, long time, without memory, I have adored you.

My prayer is sure to come true. For that is how I became what I am now.

I understand that this path will not be easy, but I also know that I can do it.

In more dramatic terms, I want to fulfill my best providence with you.

- It won't be long before we can meet, Zurvan.

I whisper and savor to the point of madness a strong mixture of bitterness and sweetness.

Yes, this very prayer is everything to me right now. The form of the miracle I desire...

And I will not allow ourselves to be hindered - even if it be by God himself.

- Where did you come from?

That was the question Magsarion asked at the star of the dragon's remains. None of us understood the meaning of those words, no matter how much we puzzled over them.

Zurvan, however, smiles ear to ear at them, as if he has finally been figured out. "Glad you noticed," he says without any attempt to turn away, and reveals his past in high spirits.

- My homeland is the Air Burial Zone. It was called by a different name at the time, but I think that answers that, Magsarion. I have a score to settle with Mashyana.

The fifth king of evil, the Immovable Impurity Mashyana. To us she is an irreconcilable enemy and one of the ultimate evils, yet he calls her his little sister.

This means that Zurvan was born a star spirit. But he is definitely human now, and I have no idea how to explain it.

- Thirteen years ago, Mashyana killed me. She and I were twin stars, but of different colors, all according to **Avesta**. My body was swallowed whole and completely, and all I had to do was nourish my little sister and disappear... supposedly.

- Then why did you arise in the holy kingdom?

- I don't know. I remember trying to teleport at the last moment, but I suspect something else was involved. Anyway, I've been like this ever since. When I woke up, I was already human and impotent. Well, not that it bothered me, but long story short, I think I literally found a new life.

He was born a star spirit, died a star spirit, but he didn't disappear, but was reborn in the holy kingdom as a man.

It would be difficult for an outsider to believe such a confession, but I understand that Zurvan is not lying.

After all, for some reason he has always stubbornly refused to lie. Even with his frivolous behavior, which everyone has long tired of, I know him as a man who suspiciously avoids any untruth.

- No matter how it works, that's how I became me. But it seems that even so, we are not so easily separated from each other. My sense of smell has proven to be extremely sharp-perhaps because my sister is the king of evil.

- Do you think your flair for the Daeva is Mashyana's influence?

- Most likely. Apparently it's some kind of mirror. I'm sure she can't sit still either, let her sniff out a yazat or two. And this is just a reflection.

The inherent bond of the twins has to do with the unity of opposites because of the relationship between good and evil. Zurvan complains about this discomfort, as if mocking herself.

- Anyway, she must have noticed that I survived, too. I was also sure she had noticed that I had survived, but thanks to my reincarnation, it wouldn't be easy for her to track me down by smell, and it would be a long time before we would meet. I was not sure how much she cared for her older brother-not that she could expect to forget me that quickly, much less forgive me and let me go.

- So, sooner or later she will come for you?

Magsarion nods, as if slowly tasting the thought. He has known Zurvan long enough not to question his story, and instead informs him with a shiver in his voice, anticipating the carnage:

- You are the bait.

It's as if he's found an extremely convenient thing for himself... You can hear both ruthlessness and arrogance in his voice.

- Henceforth be by my side when I tell you, Zurvan. Refuse, and I will kill you here.

- Okay, you got it, Warden. To tell you the truth, I'm running out of time myself. I'd be only too happy to count on your help to end my war with my sister.

That's their deal... All the details of that conversation we never got to hear.

- However, the best thing would be if we never meet her.

Zurvan turns the conversation into a joke, but not at all because she fears the evil king that she once killed him.

One can only feel the sadness of an older brother caring for his sister.

Regrets, pity that they never understood each other, remaining in a black and white relationship.

The fact that his soul, which is usually so hard to read, makes it so openly clear, must mean just that. I think I can see the true implication of his words that the world is better off being messy and crazy, that just two value systems for everyone is too boring.

The idea of empathy going beyond good and evil. The belief that he is capable of going against the foundations of the universe.

Without a doubt, Zurvan loves Mashyana.

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I fall into the sky. It is this contradiction that proves to be the first thing I realize after a brief thought-reading.

- Stay awake, Quinn, if you've decided to come with us, get a grip!
- ...E-excuse me!

Zurvan's merciless rebuke lacks even a fraction of the melancholy I glimpsed in his recollections.

Of course. After all, our small group of three had just penetrated the evil king's domain.

- You have to give the gift of flight twice, no less. Otherwise you'll fly to the other side of the planet!

I can't understand where his commands are coming from-it's as if they're coming from all directions at once. All that is clear is that even a tree leaf in a storm would not envy my fate right now.

After the cracks that have arisen in the sky of the holy kingdom have drawn us in, we appear already in a completely different world. There is no doubt that this particular land, where violent waves of atmospheric pressure dance, is the mystical realm, ruled by a starry spirit in the person of the fifth king of evil.

The Air Burial Zone, Drudge Nasu...

- ...How so?!

As I obey the directions and finally assume a stable position, I see the boundless sky spread out before me, literally.

The panorama before me is a grandiose pattern of clouds. The atmosphere here seems to consist mostly of hydrogen, methane, helium, and ammonia. An ordinary human wouldn't survive here, but it's no problem for me, and Zurvan and Magsarion have stellar spirit protection.

This means that the environment is not so hostile, and any Yazata is used to operating in such conditions. However, a much deeper, more primitive fear throws me into a shiver... No, the realization that something is missing.

- There is no earth on this planet.

There is no sense of a solid rock on which to rest my feet and stand upright. The universal mother, necessary for every first step, supporting anyone from the beginning, is absent here.

I have heard that the Air Burial Zone is a gas giant, but even on such planets the density of matter increases closer to the center, and it cannot retain its gaseous form.

Here there is no end to the flying and falling. A world in which the very idea of rootedness has been destroyed.

A planet where everything is buried in the sky.

- I'd put it a little differently. It's not like there's no earth here.

Zurvan spits, not even trying to hide his dislike.

- It's just that what replaces it is so dangerous that it won't let anyone set foot on it.

Once he says it, something impressive pierces the sea of clouds.

- Zurvan, Zurvan... You're back at last, little brother.

- Shut up, you who are told I am the eldest!

The bizarre plant that tore the heavens of the holy kingdom and drew us to itself.

Its size cannot even be estimated by eye. The way it makes the eyeballs go crazy is reminiscent of the absurdity that Father embodies.

The starry spirit--this is the true face of Mashyana. In that case, Zurvan's recent words can indeed be understood.

On this planet, only Mashyana has the right to put down roots. It is this great tree that is the core, the earth, and the great mother, and that is why it is the only unquestionable authority that no one has the right to encroach upon.

This planet is doomed, even if not in the same way as the star of the dragon remains of Kaikhosru. The realization of how catastrophic the rule of an evil star spirit is once again leaves me cold from head to toe.

What's more, we don't yet know a fraction of the threat it poses.

- Why are you alive? Why have I become like this? Why, why, how annoying... I've swallowed you whole, I can still taste you.

The devil's trees grow out of the clouds one by one, and there is no end to them. Already they can be called a real forest, but even with this density they are beginning to expand, covering the heavens.

The first thing we saw was just the tip of a single branch. On the intertwining trees of unimaginable size, innumerable buds grow noisily, blooming one by one.

In only a few moments they are already blooming majestically in lush color, and we are presented with a pale pink floral pattern. Let this world tree of weeping cherry trees be filled with a mysterious beauty worthy of religious art, but our collective intuition trumpets the alarm.

These flowers feed on any life that comes within their reach. The promiscuous beauty of a bloodsucker capable of seducing anyone.

- And yet let me forgive you. I will gladly take you in my arms a second time.

The flowers begin to fall. When I see a petal flying in our direction, I finally realize how enormous our enemy is.

It can't be... Are you seriously telling me it's bigger than the whole island?!

- We'll get through- don't think you can dodge one of those!

- O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!



Zurvan's angry shout overlaps with Magsarion's howl. At the same time, I also put Saam on myself and hit the petal with all my might.

- GHHHH!!!

It's hard to say whether our combined response has been successful. At least we manage to stay alive, and we withstand the first attack of the king of evil.

We never manage to get through, however. The petal is already falling down, but all we were able to do was change its flight path.

We did not repel it, nor did we pass through it. Even the thin petal-though you can't call it thin, it's clearly tens of meters thick-was too hard and heavy for us, like a mountain.

Even now, my fist feels a dull pain from the impact. Zurvan is right: dodging such huge objects is simply impossible forever, and even teleportation can only be used a limited number of times. So this is really the only option available to us, though it doesn't seem promising to me either.

In a storm of petals stretching as far as the eye can see, there are easily tens of billions. Trying to break through it head-on would be like fighting a meteor shower.

- ... I'll kill you.

But Magsarion doesn't back down, dashing forward again and again. In his usual fashion, he thinks nothing of the consequences; though so far this recklessness has always ended successfully, I find it hard to believe that this time he can turn the situation in our favor.

There is nothing we can do now but try for a moment to prolong our position, which cannot even be called deplorable. We have no time to make a plan to get out of the situation, and our strength is leaving us before our eyes.

Even Zurvan, who never loses his carefree mood, grinds his teeth in worry. As soon as I cast a glance at him, I feel a sense of impending doom. The sense of futility of our every action is replaced by terror that is about to give way to despair...

- It's your fault I've become this way. I am falling apart. I am fading. I am melting. No matter how much I slow it down at someone else's expense, there is no stopping it. Gayomart is dying because you dared to reject me, Zurvan.

My consciousness is about to leave me, but looking at the mirage of the storm of petals that surrounds the world tree of Mashyana, for some reason I feel in it the exact opposite of the darkness and filth.

There is an unbearable putrid stench in the air. Come to think of it, I felt it when Mashyana first appeared, and I knew even then. That it was a rotten stench that I couldn't do anything about.

In other words, impurities. Wohu Mana's clairvoyance peered into the very essence of the fifth king of evil and gave her the name "Immobility of Impurity." What, I wonder, is its meaning?

Immobility can still be understood. Mashyana, whose true form is a tree, really has little to do with any movement. That which puts down roots, spreads its crown and thereby expands its domain, is essentially disposed to a tranquil existence.

What, then, is the meaning of "uncleanness"? What is the reason why, of all the kings of evil, she alone is vicious enough to merit such censure?

The fact that I am reasoning about such abstract matters in spite of my present situation probably means that I do not have long to live. And perhaps that's why the result becomes just that.

- You have stolen my heart.

As soon as I hear these words, something really resonates in my chest. Not physically-as if through me, in an extremely distant dimension... something sits there encircling me in its strong, warm embrace.

Yes, I can hear my heart beating.

- ....Kh!

At the same time there is a deafening roar, followed by unimaginable destruction. The supernatural blow, which destroyed several thousand petals and even left a mark on Mashyana herself, had been delivered by an unrelated Zurvan, and even by Magsarion, who was not devoid of any common sense.

It was none other than myself. A single blow of my fist, which I did completely involuntarily, did considerable damage to the fifth king of evil.

- ...You!

I can't even feel the pressure of Mashyana, blazing with anger at the unforeseen backlash. No wonder I am more surprised than she is.

- Brother...

As might be expected, Magsarion looks just as stunned, and as I look into his eyes, I suddenly feel an indescribable feeling.

Like sorrow, like regret, but also like pity and even horror.

What happened to me? Not long ago all of Mashyana's attention was on Zurvan, and she didn't even expect me to put up a decent fight.

That meant that I couldn't use my trump card. If only because this feature only allows me to become a worthy victim for the enemy, which means that even in the best case, I can only rise to their level.

Obviously, however, my punch outstripped Mashyana-I felt it with my whole body. But then, what explanation is there?

- Don't think about what you can't grasp. Act while you can, Quinn!

- ...Yes!

I still don't understand anything, but Zurvan's instruction brings me to my senses. He's right-now all we have to think about is how to get out of this situation.

I can return to this mystery after I leave here alive.

- ...What a nerve. Since you dared to interrupt our intimacy, be prepared to be punished appropriately.

Mashyana, who has regained her composure, pierces me with a look of appraisal. She doesn't seem to have Frederica's absurd regeneration, and yet her wounds heal much faster than the average Daeva. She also has impressive stamina for her size.

Which means, let's face it, time is our enemy. Now that we've made a small breach in her defenses, we must see it through.

The pale pink petals approach us again, and I kick one of them away with all my might. A meteor shower-like storm flies out in all directions, like blood spatter.

- Whew! I don't know what it is, but we're clearly on the upswing!

- Yes, even if I couldn't repeat the previous blow.

No doubt my strength is growing before my eyes, but I'm nowhere near as good as my first strike. The fact that I had dispelled a storm of petals but hadn't reached Mashyana's body itself was proof of that.

- Never mind, too much luck would be far more suspicious. Remember, Quinn, super moves are cool precisely because you can't use them whenever you want.

His attitude to what's going on as a game worries me, but on the other hand, you could say that Zurvan is back to his normal state. He is an insufferable man, and yet you can rely on him in some respects.

He is not guided by logic, and now he is impossibly close to some kind of "answer. And if Zurvan behaves as usual, that can be considered a guarantee of an advantage.

That leaves the last one... I feel uncomfortable with the fact that Magsarion has been silent and unmoving all this time, but for now it would be best to follow Zurvan's instructions.

- As you say. I'll try to make a path, I'll leave the cover to you.

- Yeah, for now we have to get inside her. We'll do the rest later.

He may be hopeless, but he was once a star spirit. If he comes face to face with the core of his older, younger twin sister Mashyana, he might have something to counter her.

I gather the overflowing strength in my arms and legs and shout with the firm intention of clearing the way.

- Ha-ah-ah-ah!!!

The rest can only be compared to a raging torrent. The constantly shifting petals still pose an enormous danger, but now I can break through them. Smashing, piercing, trampling underfoot-ramming my way forward as if through a tsunami.

I feel again the white landscape I saw in the battle with Frederica on the star of the dragon's remains before I passed out. This time, not vaguely, but clearly and distinctly, fully aware of what's happening.

Someone was calling to me from the warm, blinding light. "Quinn, Quinn"-one, two, no, not like that.

Ten people, a hundred - more, even more. "Everyone" here can't even be counted, and each of them is waving at me with a smile.

There's Raleigh here. There's Marika. And others, and others - all the ones I've encountered so far. Those whom I have saved and those whom I have failed to save - all, without exception, shimmer in this light.

Moreover, there are those whom I am seeing for the first time, but about them I have not the slightest doubt.

They are the same legendary Yazatas who died twenty years ago at the hands of their father... Certainly those are the heroes who served the sword of Lord Varhran and dedicated their lives to the cause of good.

If you count even such distant people, their total number could well be called incalculable. And all of them push me forward in a single impulse.

Go, crush the enemy, take victory in your own hands.

Exactly, I can clearly hear my heart beating.

And it is nothing less than the rhythm of a miracle!

- Clearly, Nadare told of this.

Ominous impurities turn to me, looking down on me. Frighteningly cold, with a detachment bordering on terror.

- So you're ■■■■■■■■■■■■ ■■■■■ ...

—

The words sound like a curse, but I can't hear them clearly. It's not because the sounds of battle overlap, or because I'm so absorbed in the white world.

It's because I'm not yet able to readjust to the point where I understand the idea. The truth, which I understood on the level of instinct, remains a mystery behind the seven seals...

- You are a fool, Khvarenah, for creating something so repulsive.

The world tree of Mashian begins to wriggle. As if intent on burying its stillness in these heavens, it unleashes its grandiose power of itself, clearly intent on killing us.

At the same time, even the petals hovering in the air begin to wriggle. Each one begins to bubble, as if something is about to hatch.

- I will give you the death that such stench deserves. Let your filthy prayers be consumed by my nasu.

At the same moment, a buzzing sound like an explosion hits my ears. Along with it comes the shockwave.

- ...Damn it, is that how she decided?

I can hear Zurvan's annoyance, even at the second loss of hearing. And with it, of course, the new threat before us.

Raising an unholy buzz, nasu flies and vausagi bees swarm in the sky. Each one is the size of a cow and has the aura of a formidable drujwant.

All of them have just broken out of the petals en masse. As far as I can make out with my function, there were hundreds of millions of them in just one petal-an absurd number and density.

So now they are an army whose numbers are simply impossible to measure. Each one of these insects has the power of a second-rank daeva, and their maneuverability makes it impossible to defeat them all at once.

What's more, the storm of petals is still raging. Because of their combined onslaught, it could well be said that we are back to where we started.

The Fifth King of Evil Mashyana... The way she combines quantitative and qualitative advantage is beyond the bounds of reason just as it was in the case of her father. Still, you can't call her an ordinary monster.

- Can you handle it, Quinn?

- It won't be easy... but I suppose I have no choice.

I clench my fists, adopt a fighting stance, and try to stay calm. I have to find a way to win before this army goes on the offensive in a second or two.

I can still see the white world. I hear everyone's voices. If I can strike that first blow again, the one that managed to hit Mashyana...

- This is the end, little girl. First I will destroy you, and then we will continue our encounter of thirteen years ago, Zurvan.

Oh miracle, come down to us. O heart, beat louder. If there is a power within me, let it reveal its truth...

Perhaps the unforeseen event that happened a second later was the result of that prayer.

- Hold it right there!

A sudden shout from the heavens leaves me, Zurvan, and even Mashyana stunned. The voice announces its intervention, but it sounds so clear that it doesn't seem fully aware of the current situation-so full of anticipation and joy.

If there's anything to compare it to, it's being part of a long-awaited holiday. In a good way, you can hear courage, in a bad way, you can hear undisguised infantile excitement. The person in front of us is quite difficult to describe in one word.

- I apologize for the wait, young lady, but now that I'm here, you can rest easy. So, it's superhero time!

- Ah, well...

Striking a spectacular pose, he?...or maybe "she" after all. The mysterious sidekick, who appears to be a girl dressed in a man's dress, makes it seem as if we're standing on a stage where a play is about to begin.

Simply put, her every action is exaggerated and contrived. Moreover, her suspiciousness is impossible to describe in words, and her inappropriate clowning does not make me laugh at all.

I hate to admit it, but this character, taking everything around her as a play, even irritates me. And that's because she gives me a strange sense of déjà vu...

- Who else are you? Disappear.

- Do-a-a-a-a-a-a!!

Nasu flaps her wings and the self-appointed superhero flies away screaming.

She's weak. Too weak. At the sight of such disappointing physical attributes, I can only wonder why she showed up here in the first place.

However, the fact that Mashyana took her for a minor nuisance and tossed her aside as not even worthy of being killed can be called great good fortune. We're in no position to worry about anyone else's safety now, and we'd be glad to see her out of the battlefield that way.

But we can only dream of that.

- That's enough, you asked for it, Mashyana. Now I'm really angry!

- Hey, calm down already!

The self-appointed superhero returns and, in the same bizarre manner, strikes a pose and raises a ruckus. She concludes with a smug wink in my direction.

- I'm Incest. Call me that from now on, pretty lady.

- No, I'm telling you...





The enigmatic Ashavan, Incest, has no intention of backing down. Her willingness to fight the king of evil himself inspires respect, but in fact she just doesn't know when to stop. In fact, her strength isn't even greater than that of the average commoner at best. And if you look at things realistically, she's rather below average.

After all, she was thrown off with a single flap of her wings by an enemy henchman. What's more, this nasu did exactly as her mistress willed, with minimal effort, literally to blow away a speck of dust.

If she's attacked with the firm intention of killing, one touch is enough to make Incest a mere speck of dust. How can I make her understand her position, and that now is not the time for such a farce?

- Annoying trash. If you want to die so much, so be it, get lost.

In a sense, the enemy has been taken by surprise, and so the insects and petals have frozen in place, but now they are finally coming back into motion. I jump to the side of Incest to protect her, but at the same time I see something astonishing.

- You're such an under-thought, Mashyana. It's only natural now, though.

Incest smiles a sort of sad smile, pulls out an old-fashioned pistol, and points it into the air. A mysterious force gathers at its muzzle, and I already wonder if it's my father's creation, but immediately realize it isn't.

- Listen and remember. There's no way you can beat me. And that's because...

The main anomaly here is Incest. Undoubtedly, she is feeble, and even now she cannot at all be called mighty...

But somehow I understand. While she fights in the Air Burial Zone, Incest is a hero in the true sense of the word.

- A flower without love is devoid of beauty. And here is proof of that!

Along with the line, for which I'm frankly ashamed, a light bullet that flew out of the muzzle destroys most of the petals. Not because they were blown away by the wind or splintered by force - rather, it is as if it freely controls some kind of chemical reaction, unbelievable, and therefore undeniable.

It is no longer simply a matter of the compatibility of their abilities-it can only be explained by the effect on causality. It's as if this relationship between Mashyana and Incest was predestined, and already so...

- So you too should soon face your ignorance. And then you, like me... whoa, whoa-oh!

- ...Careful!

In the end, the Incest reception only affected the petals. The minions that exist apart from their mistress felt no effect, and the flood of insects nearly covers her head, but at the last moment I manage to save her.

- G-damn it, that's not fair! Aren't villains supposed to say things like, "If you want something done well, do it yourself," only to regret it later?!

- Shut up, or you'll bite your tongue.

I hold the squealing Incest under my arm, fighting off the swarm of insects with my legs and retreating from the danger zone. Her temper still robs me of my tongue, and yet I feel a glimmer of hope for us.

I have no idea what this is all about, but Incest has a unique power over Mashyana. That means that, combined with my new power, we can achieve some pretty decent results.

- Hey, Quinn, who the hell is that?

- I don't know. Isn't she a friend of yours, Zurvan?

Since they behave similarly defiantly, I thought they were former comrades-in-arms, but he denies it.

It seems that even Zurvan, who was born in the Air Burial Zone, is not familiar with Incest. However, considering that he has returned here after an absence of thirteen years, it is quite natural. Anyway, now we need to adjust our tactics to this suspicious assistant.

- I'll cover you up front, and you concentrate your forces on Mashyana. You both fight with firearms, so let Zurvan, too...

I'm rambling on about the details of the plan, but suddenly I notice something's wrong.

- What is it, Incest? Can you hear me?

- Oh, well, it's...

Incest stands there staring at one point. With a pale face and trembling all over her body, as if she were dreaming a bad dream.

- Please pull yourself together, we need your help now.

- I understand. But, but... Ahhhh, what is this?!

Suddenly Incest breaks down like a hysterical child, and starts waving her arms and legs around. I let her go, unable to make sense of what is happening.

- You should have been warned! Do you have any idea how long I've waited... how long I've waited for this day?!
- Hey you, stop talking nonsense. You want me to hit you?!
- Stop it, Zurvan, we need to calm down...
- Hee-hee-hee-hee!

Zurvan finally loses her patience and flies closer, and Incest hides behind my back with a squeal. Then she peeks out from behind me with one eye and whispers quietly, as if checking something.

- ...Zurvan? It's Zurvan, isn't it? Is it?
- What's wrong with her... Do you know me? I've never seen you before.
- ...
- Hey, how about that?
- He says he doesn't know you.
- Ooh...

I feel like I'm the translator here. Scared beyond belief, Incest doesn't look Zurvan in the face and only responds when I speak to her.

- This, listen, I have a favor to ask of you.
- My name is Quinn. What do you want?
- Yeah, well... Why don't we get out of here for a while?
- Huh?!

Still, even I can't hide my irritation, and there's an involuntary cold tone in my voice. What has she been trying to achieve all this time?

Why should we run away if she's the one who came here and announced herself as an assistant!

- Well, you know, we're just getting to know each other, so it's a little too early to fight the boss. First we get to know each other better, bind each other by the bonds of love and courage - we have plenty of time anyway. In fact, that's the way things are usually done, I think!

- Incest... Please, stop fooling around. If we could run, we would have done it long ago!

- It's no big deal, you can see for yourself the state Mashyana's in!

Screaming in tears, Incest points sharply in the direction of the fifth king of evil. As she says, the Immovable Impure is silent and unresponsive to anything.

Of course, her insects are not affected, but Mashyana herself is indeed frozen. Perhaps this is a consequence of the Incest attack... Then we all the more reason not to miss this opportunity.

No doubt this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and yet...

- So let's get out of here, shall we? Let's get out of here, huh? I'll show you my house, we'll talk it over in three days, we'll get ready, and we'll get our revenge!

- GHHHH!...

The order of Incest is unusually strong. I can't look at it, she's obviously talking nonsense, and yet I can't help but contradict her.

To make every effort to gather miracles and fight evil... Even now I feel within me the insane demands of my father and his Majesty, but the foolish prayer of Incest may well be able to compete with them in weight.

I feel as if I am being torn apart by conflicting instructions. I've never felt conflict like this before, and I myself don't notice how the white world I was so counting on is beginning to fade...

- Oh, stop - what is he doing!

Incest starts screaming again, and as I follow her gaze, I see even more indescribable chaos.

A dark, ominous vortex that can't be called anything other than "distortion"... Needless to say, who exactly is its source.

- Magsarion...

He has been silent ever since the mysterious power was awakened in me, but now he is acting again. No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that all this time he has been trying to do so.

- What's that?

Not surprisingly, even Zurvan frowns questioningly at the inexplicable phenomenon that has enveloped Magsarion. Of course, I can't help but shudder, either.

I've never seen anything like this before. Only the instinctive danger is painfully obvious-I can only understand how limitless this abomination is.

A curse that has nothing to do with good or evil, creeping into anyone's very soul. It's as if some third value system is being revealed to me, violating the primary rule of the universe...

Perhaps my white world has dimmed precisely because it has been confronted with this distortion.

- This is bad, very bad! What's the matter with him, Mashyana resonates with him!

Incest with redoubled fierceness cries out for me to stop him, but it's too late.

- Brother... I was wrong. It looks like I can still meet you.

As if in delirium, Magsarion speaks to himself, and the blast of distortion turns into a violent torrent, consuming us all.

Black, black, indescribably deep... My eyes are blinded by a prayer that swears to last forever.

I seem to see a boy somewhere in the distance.

Even the silhouette of him waving his sword too big for a child, and the hatred that makes the air shake.

At the sight of his small back, covered in sweat and blood, I feel as if he were crying.



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- ...

Watching from the depths of Gaiaomart, Mashyana idly tilts her cup of wine.

She sank into silence in the middle of the battle not at all because she was subjected to Incest's surprise counterattack. Certainly that one did her proper damage, but the fifth king of evil is not so simple as to allow herself to be cornered by such trifle. After all, only her petals were destroyed, and the overall loss is minimal.

Be that as it may, Mashyana has not let even one of her branches go to waste. Both Quinn and Incest were indeed rather annoying, and yet she was sure that if she made the proper effort, she could destroy them without difficulty-in fact, that's exactly where it was going.

In that case, why didn't Mashyana act wisely and let her adversaries get away? The answer lies on an entirely different plane-because she saw something unimaginable.

- Who it was...

She whispers with contempt in her voice and resolutely brings the wine to her mouth. The sakura petals, touching her graceful and enchanting lips, decompose and turn to dust in an instant.

It was the Magsarion that alerted Mashyana. More accurately, she decided to interrupt the attack, since she could not understand it, and instead began to watch him.

Indeed, this black knight displayed a power that was mysterious. It must be admitted that it was so foreign that it evoked a sense of danger.

However, one who fears such things is not destined to become the king of evil. Even when faced with a desperate situation, one need only cast it away by force, which is how Mashyana is accustomed to acting.

There is, however, a reason why she could not go on the offensive. With a flicker of her long lashes, the Immovable Unclean looks at her own hand. A graceful white finger, resembling a work of art, wrapped around a ring of curved metal.

- It resonated with my Mashyana. So it did. However, why did it lead to such a result?

From Mashyana's perspective, a single event occurred that she cannot ignore. It seems to her that if she leaves this mystery unsolved, unimaginable consequences will overtake her.

- The curse...

Gripped by inexplicable irritation, Mashyana drinks from the cup again and notices her reflection in the trembling surface of the wine.



A face graceful and beautiful, but still reminiscent of a dead man's mask. Even now a storm of cherry petals dances around, as if heralding the end of life...

"A flower without love is devoid of beauty"... Who put it that way?

- ...Kh!

Mashyana involuntarily drops the cup and turns away. The woman, feared as an arrogant, cold, merciless wretch, trembles like a helpless child.

- It's all your fault, Zurvan... It's all your fault.

Ah, there is no time at all. Whispering in the midst of the pale pink storm, Mashyana looks mesmerizing yet painfully fleeting at the same time.

### 3

I don't know whose thoughts I'm reading or what meaning is embedded in them. But these fuzzy memories draw me irresistibly toward them. I feel compelled to understand this plea and take it with me.

- You say you desire me. But is it really your own intention? Is it not possible that you are only acting as others desire, unable to resist their will?

The voice is calm and monotone, expressing only what comes to mind unvarnished. At first glance it seems cold, even mechanical, but I sense a deep weariness in it.

"Her" voice sounds as if she has been walking for years, but has still achieved nothing, tired of the worthlessness of what is happening.

- No need to be so surprised, O hero. I know my own words sound ridiculous, and I'm not going to deny your way of life. I am only somewhat tired. Perhaps I have already begun to show fault.

The way she whispers proves my hunch that she is admitting her own exhaustion. The details are unknown to me, but she is beginning to forget her purpose, despite the fact that creation itself has assigned her an important role.

So the problem is very serious. Of course, this cannot be overlooked, and yet it's not what I remember.

Hero... That's what she just called her interlocutor. The meaning of the word is obvious.

Her interlocutor is none other than Lord Varhran himself. But I do not see the hero himself, nor do I even hear his words.

- And what, then, do you still want to say that you wish for a miracle? To tell you the truth, I would prefer to go to sleep sooner. Not because I'm dissatisfied with you: rather, you're just too much like a hero. I feel that my efforts will once again be wasted...

The desire to change everything. To see a future in which everything would be different. Now her soul is a prisoner of this hope, this despair.

Something resembling a desire for self-destruction, a destructive, yet sincere form of prayer...

- Remember, my hero. If you so wish to summon a lady who does not burn with the desire to obey, you must pay the price. If you think that I desire my own destruction, you should also take the destruction factor. Get your hands dirty with things that are not your own.

She dreams of heaven, but at the same time it is as if she wishes to go with him to hell. I cannot understand exactly what Lord Varhran thinks of this suggestion and how he responds to it.

However, everyone knows exactly how the hero's life ended, and I understand that everything that happens to this day is predetermined here.

- This is where our contract comes into play. Ah, what an unconscionable deed we are committing.

Burned by the flames of callousness and ruthlessness, her consciousness fades. Following her, I, too, begin to awaken from my mysterious slumber and regain consciousness.

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Following this, I open my eyes. At the same time, the memory of the dream fades and becomes hazy, but there is something that still lingers in my soul.

The way this woman wanted to be saved. She may have been broken, but she was definitely certain of some kind of victory. Let it lead to Lord Varhran's tragedy, but she didn't seem to call it an outright mistake.

All because in the future that followed, we exist. If you take the words "destruction factor" literally, we all carry a grievous sin.

Forced or not, she was serious, and perhaps that is why Lord Varhran went along with her. Which meant that to oppose his choice now would simply be rude.

To grieve and complain to the people of the old days is like admitting that nothing can be undone. I believe that such behavior can only be called laziness and shifting responsibility, and so I will remember and inherit her will as sincerely as possible.

Simply put, she was begging for a violation of the status quo. The very desire to try to do things differently, brought on by the anguish of vain labor and helplessness, is quite sympathetic to me. It may be a double-edged sword, but if I make no mistake, such a point of view may yet come in handy.

Which means it's time for me to return to my current state of affairs.

- Hey, you awake yet? How are you feeling?

- Incest... Where are we?

When I wake up, I see that I'm lying in a bed standing in a room of someone's house, with Incest standing next to me. If this is what I think it is, then I don't understand what happened.

I mean, we passed out when we got hit by Magsarion's weird reception...

- Well, that does beg the question. I'll answer it, of course, but I want you to promise me something first. It's very important that we have nothing to talk about without it. Okay?

In response to her question, I just nod silently. Incest smiles and continues.

- Thank you. You see, I serve as a champion of justice. Well, by your standards I'm only an inept amateur, but I have my pride, too, and I never lie. Superheroes always have to keep a lot of secrets, don't they?

- So you don't want me to be interested in your story. Am I getting that right?

- Exactly. I take it you just read my mind, but you better not do that again. I swear you won't hear a word of lies from me, so just don't dig too deep.

She continues to guffaw, but the thought contained in her words is surprisingly strong. Like that time, the weight of Incest's pleading might well be a match for my father.

So even if I tried to look into her soul, I wouldn't succeed. As much as I would like to question her about her mysterious power or about that strange tantrum, I can only obey.

- It will be done. I swear that from now on I will not read your mind against your will. So, if I may return to my question...

- Where are we? On Ash's back.

- Ash?



I try to get up suspiciously, and Incest proudly protrudes his chest.

- Ashozushta. The name is long, hard to pronounce, and not the least bit cute, so I call her Ash affectionately. It is a very large bird.

- A bird?! And now we are on her back?

I look around again in amazement, paying careful attention to the little things. Both the architecture and the furniture and the rest of the decoration look perfectly normal, but I do feel some slight shivering, which the average man in the street may not catch.

Ashozushta, Ashozushta... At the mention of the huge bird, I am immediately reminded of Wohu Mana, and the way it continues to live so long in Mashyana's domain clearly points to its imposing power. In turn, the fact that "she" protects me, Incest, and others leaves no doubt about her ashawana nature.

- It all adds up. Was it also because of Ashozushta that you were able to use the gift of flight?

- It doesn't work outside these heavens, but she can teleport, too. That's how we brought you here, so you'd better remember our kindness to Ashozushta and me.

Incest takes on such an important look that she almost bends over backwards, still considering what is happening to be some kind of spectacle, in which she plays the role of the catcher. Once again I feel a kind of déjà vu in connection with this, and I finally understand something.

Incest resembles Zurvan. By her clothes, her demeanor, her manner of speech, even the way she dislikes lying... It's all oddly different from him, but the overall impression is the same with him in everything.

It could be compared to a poor quality costume. One of those cases where the technical execution leaves a lot to be desired, but which is recognized by those who are familiar with the original, as it is just overflowing with love for it.

Both the strange desire to portray a man and the self-appointed title of superhero are surely her tribute to Zurvan. If you think about it, Incest's attitude toward him can indeed be called the reaction of an ardent admirer, and such admiration not infrequently develops into imitation.

It is difficult to understand why she chose Zurvan among all possible candidates...

- What's up, Quinn? You can't take your eyes off me... Ha-ha-ha, you're in love, aren't you? Yeah, I got to admit, it's not easy living with my awesomeness.

- No, don't worry about that. You don't have to worry about that.

I don't know exactly how she imagines Zurvan, but they do have a strikingly annoying trait in common. The fact that my anguish has doubled gives me a headache, but Incest ignores it and starts talking nonstop.

- I think you know this already, but all stars and planets are essentially alive. It's true that not everyone can get their identity and become a star spirit, and that only happens as a result of a long evolution anyway. Usually they have to climb hard to the very top of the hierarchy, and although there are cases when their place is taken by someone else, for the most part they are surprisingly nice creatures. Just because they have tremendous power doesn't make them unblemished gods.

- Incest.

I put my hand forward and interrupt her lengthy explanation. Even without reading her mind, I can guess what she's getting at, and I'd like to avoid wasting time if possible.

- Is that your goal, then? To defeat Mashyana and let Ashozushta become the new star spirit?

- Mm, well, yeah, that's pretty much it... Has anyone ever told you that you're not particularly patient?

- Unfortunately. The thing is, I already know how hard the fight for this planet is, and you don't have to tell me that. I also understand that Mashyana's power is surprisingly unstable.

- Especially since there's always seemed to be plenty of strong guys here. Mashyana only got an identity about thirty years ago, and the fight against her is the latest mess, but I've heard that a few hundred years ago was a turbulent time, too. Ashozushta told me that there was one particularly wild pair that even now rages somewhere else.

- Locusts, huh? They're quite famous in the holy kingdom.

There are four candidates for evil kings, daevas of special rank. Monserrat of the Garden of Bloodshed, Kaikhosru's servant the Princess of the Dragon-Pearls, and the locusts of Ruth, Zairiched and Taurvid.

The latter two were born in the Air Burial Zone, and from what I hear, because of the atrocities they committed, the few survivors joined forces and drove them out. Most likely, Ashozushta was one of them as well.

Despised by all, the locusts left their homeland, continued to wreak havoc in distant lands, and then met the third king of evil, which brought them to their current situation.

As the archives of the holy kingdom and the Incest story suggest, strong warriors are often born in the Air Burial Zone, and the situation here has indeed remained troubled for generations.

After all, this is Zurvan's homeland, and even now people with inexplicable abilities like Incest appear here. So far, I don't hear anything unnatural in her story.

- Well, anyway, if that's the case, I want Mashyana to leave her post. She's not much good for the role anyway, so it would be better if she gave it up nicely.

And yet there is still one discrepancy. I can't explain it properly, but Incest is too peaceful toward Mashyana.

Indeed, the fifth king of evil is a great mother to the inhabitants of the Air Burial Zone. She may have acquired an identity only thirty years ago, but this planet has been her body since time immemorial. Even Ashozushta or locusts are actually children of Mashyana.

This means that some affection is quite appropriate, but only if their colors are the same. In a universe where even mother and fetus fight to the death, Incest's attitude does seem strange.

Why does she feel so sorry for Mashyana, even as an ashavan? Where does this sense of sorrow come from when she speaks of defeating the king of evil?

Perhaps it is also the influence of Zurvan? However, his behavior is often so unheard of that simply no one could imitate him.

I can't help feeling like there's a small bone stuck in my throat, but since I've just been forbidden to dig any deeper, I can't find out the details...

- ...Okay. You are our ally, and since our goals are the same now, I don't care about the rest.

- I'm glad to hear that. Don't worry, with me we'll win for sure! I'm a superhero, after all!

I am bothered by the snow-white smile with which she declares this, but I take a deep breath and put the questions away. I can ask Ashozushta if I need to, but right now I have more important things to discuss.

- What of my companions? They are both unharmed, are they not?

- Ah yes, about that...

As soon as I ask Incest, her speech immediately becomes much less confident. Seeing this, I immediately feel uneasy.

From her demeanor and intonation, I thought we'd managed to avoid the worst-isn't that right?

- Zurvan is fine. He's back in his homeland after a long departure, so he's probably just walking around somewhere. But the other one...

From the look on her face, she doesn't know how to assess what's happened. Incest points to the window with her chin, and I cautiously look out.

We may be on the back of a huge bird, but the landscape outside the window is no different from an ordinary village. Perhaps some kind of barrier has been erected around it, because the air outside is quite normal: here are farmers plowing fields, here are children playing...

- ?..

Only one child is unlike the others for some reason. He looks about six or seven years old, but he's not running around with the other children, he's standing still.

No, it's more like he's looking at them sideways... At that moment an inexplicable chill runs down my spine.

"He wasn't doing anything. He stood there with his nose turned up, stubbornly still."

For a moment, the episode Arma described comes to mind. A conversation about a boy who didn't want to communicate with the people around him for any reason.

In fact, why does this boy hide his face? Why does he carefully hide his head under a sack?

"By the way, he's been hiding his face ever since."

"I'm thinking and I realize I've never seen your face."

No way. That's not true... It's just not possible. And yet my intuition coldly assesses the situation and informs me that it undoubtedly is.

- You see it, don't you? It's him.

Incest's voice comes from somewhere far away. Neither the logic nor the reason is clear to me, but I notice that I am already acknowledging this unseen.

The fierce blade of the holy kingdom. The mysterious man who never ceases to trouble my heart, so dangerous and creepy...

One who, time after time, commits heartless and merciless deeds while continuing to cherish a certain regret in my soul...



- Magsarion...

Now for some reason took the form of a child.

## Chapter 6: Shameful Sky (Parts 4-5)



### 4

Let us calm down and try to think logically. First of all, a violation of the Commandment is in order-as Incest said she teleported us here, she may have forced Magsarion to break a taboo.

For a raging warrior, who is only allowed to touch others in a killing spree, accepting any help is obviously out of the question. That his punishment lies in his physical degradation to the level of a child is not the most obvious option, but it is possible.

Magsarion is already bound by several heavy oaths, and it is only natural that breaking any of them would not end in ordinary death. I can't say that turning into a child is a worse fate than death, but I can't think of any other explanation for such unimaginable absurdity.

However...

- No, that's not it. It is clearly the Mashyagh effect.

My speculation is quickly refuted by Incest. At the same time, she mentions an unfamiliar word, and I tilt my head questioningly.

- What is "Mashyagh"?

- Mashyana's treasure. I think you can tell from the name, but she treasures it very much and almost considers it part of herself. It seems to have fallen from heaven around the time she acquired her identity as a star spirit.

- ...

A treasure, moreover, that fell from heaven. This explanation is enough to make me understand it immediately.

- A creature... of the father...

In that case, any mysterious phenomenon is indeed possible. My brothers and sisters alone are capable of changing the state of affairs of an entire planet, even if it depends on a specific object. There's no question that it was he who made Mashyana the ruler of the Air Burial Zone, even with such powerful competition.

- And who is your father? I'm curious, could you tell me more about him?

- It's not that important. To make a long story short, I'm just like this Mashyagh.

I haven't gotten to the main question yet, so I'll keep my story to a minimum. After taking another look at the Magsarion child, I turn again to Incest.

- What makes you so sure it's a Mashyagh effect?

- Because it resonated with him like mad. Everyone who lives in these heavens understands this reaction very well.

- Indeed...I think you said something along those lines.

"Mashyagh resonates with him," "Who is that," "Stop him"... I remember Incest almost screaming at us about it.

What, then, is the essence of Mashyagh that made her so frightened?

- The ability to rejuvenate his target... Perhaps he manipulates time somehow?
- Unfortunately, I can't tell you that.
- ...
- I'm not the only one concerned. I'm sorry, but you have to understand.
- ...Okay.

It annoys me how this mystery remains unsolved, but Incest's expression of strong will leaves me no choice but to obey. However, she says she "can't tell," not "doesn't know," which means she probably understands what Mashyagh's function is. Besides, since she didn't confirm my hunch, there's a good chance that I was actually wrong.

In that case, let's try to think what other ability he might have.

It can't just be "granting its owner's wishes without flaws", so what are we supposed to do? It sounds crazy, but I'm afraid of it precisely because my father's skills allow for it. Assuming that Mashyagh is just such an improbable artefact, one can understand why Incest chose to keep quiet about it.

- Be that as it may, would it be correct to say that this is the trump card that allowed Mashyagh to take the place of the king of evil?
- You got that right. That's why it surprised me that he resonated with him.

With a sad smirk, Incest looks out the window at Magsarion standing still. What's going on doesn't seem to have been part of her plan, but at the same time she definitely seems quite curious.

- I can tell he's clearly not easy. He was able to activate Mashyana's item externally, so his potential is at least equal to hers.
- Sounds logical enough. But in this state...
- Mm-hmm. Now he's not only outwardly but inwardly a child again. You said he took some kind of creepy Commandments, but now he's not even there. I think if you destroy Mashyagh, he'll go back to normal, but until we wait for that to happen, he won't be much help in battle.

I can't say it's worth speculating about usefulness and such if I were her, but in essence Incest is right. Magsarion should not be expected to succeed as a Yazata right now.

This means that the most logical thing to do would be to return him to the holy kingdom, and request reinforcements at the same time. However, this requires Wohu Mana to lay out a route, and Mashyana will not allow a front line to be drawn here. Given her insidiousness, she's unlikely to let Magsarion get away that easily after he's stolen her treasure, and at worst this could end in a war in the holy kingdom's territory.

It would only be a repetition of the tragedy of twenty years ago. No matter what we do, it won't end well, and His Majesty is unlikely to let us do it.

But in that case, what are we to do? While I am puzzling, Incest suddenly puts his hand on my shoulder. I look up at her with surprise, and I am met with an extremely frivolous smile.

- Listen, why don't you go on a date with him?

- Huh?

The offer is so unexpected that I can't contain myself.

- This, I'm sorry. I'm not quite sure what you're getting at...

But she cuts off my embarrassed babble with a tone that sounds like heaven's providence talking to me through her.

- Boys have a weakness for beautiful older girls. Make him feel good about himself.

Date... An act of communication to improve mutual understanding and strengthen a loving or similar relationship. Also called rendezvous or one-on-one and often takes place over a meal or other recreational pastime.

Yes, I understand all that myself. In fact, I even went through it myself.

Even though it was a boy of ten from the village of Rayleigh. Little Umar loved to fish, so we played with him by the river, after which I cooked the fish he caught - it was fun. He was so kind and polite that when he held out his hand to help me across the river, I even blushed, as embarrassed as I was to admit it.

No wonder Raleigh liked him. Despite his young age, he was already a real gentleman, and even now I cherished happy memories of his advances.

That means I like dating. I'll admit it: I kept thinking I'd like to go through it again, should the opportunity arise.

Honestly. Yes. That's the truth. I have no reason to deny it.

And yet, what should I do in this situation?

- ...G-Glorious weather, isn't it?

- ...

- L-Look at all those beautiful flowers blooming.

- ...

- It might be nice to have a wreath made out of them.

- ...

- But that's just my opinion - probably better not?

- ...

- R-really. It's a shame about the flowers, too!

I'm about to have my heart broken. What the hell is this? Is that kid going to do anything at all?

This is only my second date.

If you consider that Umar earned a hundred points, then this boy earned minus five thousand.

- Shut up already, stupid. You make me sick, don't talk to me.

- Nau...

I almost snap at him in a fit of rage, but I can hold out. He may not be charming at all, but yelling won't do anything for me right now.

To begin with, I was wrong to expect him to take the lead. If that's the case, I'll have to drag him along myself.

- Do you mind if we take a walk over there? There's something we need to talk about.

- Hey... Stop it, let me go!

I pull the boy by the arm, letting his cries of indignation pass my ears. Sure, he's resisting as best he can, but considering he's literally a baby now, I have no problem taking him wherever I want.

If he were in his usual form, I wouldn't dream of it. He wasn't the kind of man you could force, and touching him would be impossible...

When I think about it, I feel a kind of strange tenderness and serenity. Of course, he continues to spout curses that I would never expect from a child, but at some point they stop annoying me.

Of course, I don't forget that right before we arrived on this planet, his adult version and I had a serious conflict. And his unforgivable statement, and his attempt to kill me, and the fact that I never managed to understand the darkness inside him, cannot be so easily put aside.

However, having become a child, Magsarion has become truly helpless, and the cursed Commandment does not lay upon him...

- Where are we, anyway? Where did my brother go? Stop it, don't touch me, who do you think you are?!

In words he continues to be alienated from me, but I understand that he's going to forgive me.

Very reluctantly, will put up with me as much as he can, but still wants to get closer to me.

Or perhaps that is the true face of his regrets.

Perhaps Magsarion became this way because he wished to make amends.

- ...So we're not in the holy kingdom? Was it because of this accident that we were thrown to another planet?

- Well, that's... about right.

After walking around the village for a while, we decide to crouch under the shade of a tree on a hill. There are green meadows all around us, as far as the eye can see, which makes me realize how huge Ashozushta is.

I wonder how nice it would be to enjoy a view like this in normal circumstances, and I force myself to speak in a carefree tone that suits the idyll unfolding around us.

- But don't worry, I'll be sure to get you home safely. However, that requires a little help from you.
- To do what I want, yes? What's the point of that?
- I'm sorry, but since this is a military secret, I can't explain further. I suppose it would be difficult for you to accept this way of putting it, but I hope you can trust me.

I put all my friendliness into my words and pause, as if pleading with him, but the boy only snorts disappointedly. Well, to tell you the truth, it's really hard to believe such an explanation.

In fact, Incest has ordered me to go out with Magsarion in order to tame him. If we stabilize the way he interferes with Mashyagh, we can deprive the fifth king of evil of her trump card, effectively taking him into our own possession.

Now, with the chances of reinforcements so slim, this condition may indeed be called necessary, but the main problem is that no one knows the truth about Mashyagh except Incest. Because of this, my behavior and arguments are not particularly convincing, and Magsarion is clearly suspicious of me.

This does not mean, however, that I am going to be cautious. Even if I have the feeling that I am searching blindly for the right path, I will still make my position clear in my own manner.

- You do want to meet Lord Varhran, don't you? You just have to keep wishing for it with all your might.
- You mean my wish will come true?
- Yes. I'm sure your brother often says something like that as well.
- ...I don't like that idea.

The irritated Magsarion's voice, despite its inherent sonority, already has a savagery to it that I'm used to. This pessimism, directed at everyone around him, and the doubts about this way of life... I'm sure that's the reason for his synchronization with Mashyagh, and now Magsarion must be spoken from the same perspective.

That's why I went into contact with him, hiding the fact that it's been twenty years since the hero's death. It is hard for me to admit that to talk sincerely about his past it is necessary, on the contrary, to tell lies, but since the truth will only complicate things, I hope he can forgive me.

- Do you know your brother well?

- No, I am no match for him, and even to hear him address me is a great honor. Let me ask you, what do you think of your noble brother?

- Oh, nothing... He's just an idiot. I haven't liked him for a long time.

It's funny to hear a seven-year-old say the word "long time," but since the occasional mockery might spoil his mood, I try to control myself.

After all, this Magsarion is so willing to talk. He may be rude and unsociable compared to the others, but compared to the Magsarion I know, he could even be called chatty.

So now I want to hear as much as I can from him. Whatever he talks about, if he does it sincerely, I want to understand and accept it.

- I can't even look at him. It gives me goosebumps and makes me sick to my stomach. He's got people like you around him all the time, and it seems creepily false to me. It's like if I go near him, I'll become something amorphous, too... And I don't want to get tangled up in the pattern of such a world.

- Fake, you say? Indeed, adult relationships can involve some cold calculation. At the very least, anyone would probably agree that, as innocent as you are, no one would be able to look at Lord Varhran...

- No. Are you sure you know him?

His look made me feel as if there was a ringing in the air. I wanted to say I knew what he was talking about, but I guess I missed.

- They are all part of the brother, and vice versa, the brother himself is all of them. They themselves call it ties and all that nonsense, but I find it all just nasty.

- ...

- But maybe I'm wrong here. I didn't even think about it until yesterday, but now I feel like I've got something wrong. It's as if I've done something incorrigible and all I've been doing all this time is regretting it... I don't like it, so I'm talking to you.

- ...Okay, so I guess you could say you're training on me?

I am bitter to listen to his irritated and frightened monologue, but at the same time I am finally convinced of my hunch.

After all, Magsarion had rewound time in order to get rid of his regrets. In that case, what exactly is the mistake he's talking about?



In general terms, it definitely has to do with the death of Lord Varhran. However, at that time, Magsarion clearly could not stand up to his father, which means that it is clearly not a matter of him not being able to support his brother in battle.

So the root of the problem is the disgust he felt toward Lord Varhrán's entourage. As far as I understand it, the problem is quite deep and is hardly confined to mere jealousy or loneliness, but it is already evident that their relationship has not gone well.

- How do you usually communicate with your brother?

- ...

- Do you fight all the time?

- ...Well, yes, I hate him.

Young Magsarion nods, as if reproaching himself. He couldn't possibly accept Lord Varhran, but he understands that it must be done, and so he is now training on me.

Based on these facts, I am beginning to think that twenty years ago Magsarion said something awful to Lord Varhran.

For example, that he didn't want to see him, or that he was dead. If that was the last thing he said to him, no wonder he regrets it to this day.

It may not be that uncommon, but that kind of regret doesn't make it any easier. I wouldn't be surprised if it plagued him for the rest of his life.

- I believe that the way in which you should behave towards Mr. Warran is a matter for you to decide. However, I am honored that you have chosen to practice on me, and I am truly happy to help you.

I lightly stroke Magsarion's head, trying to reassure him. I expect him not to like it, but he says nothing, and I decide to try to continue in the same direction.

- But if you force yourself to talk, you'll probably be misunderstood, so first let's try to rehearse the smile. Would you mind taking that bag off?

- ...What?

Hearing my request, Magsarion looks at me doubtfully. From the look in his eyes that peek through the rough hole in the sack, it's obvious he's not fooling around.

- What's this...?

Magsarion touches his canvas mask confusedly, as if he had just noticed it.

- Have you not noticed it? You've been wearing it the whole time.

- Me? Why?

Even as he continues to ask me questions, he takes his time removing the mask. The weather isn't particularly stuffy, but if he's not wearing it of his own free will, he must be annoyed by it- and yet he does nothing.

Yes, that mask is the most puzzling of circumstances right now.

If Arma is to be believed, Magsarion began to hide his face after the hero's death. Moreover, not immediately afterwards: rather, because Arma saw him practicing his sweeps.

This means that such a result was achieved in at least two steps, but for the moment Magsarion did neither.

In his mind Lord Varhran is still alive, and judging by how soft his hand was when I squeezed it, he has not yet begun his training.

So the sequence of events is broken. That's also clear from the fact that he didn't notice it himself until I pointed it out to him. And if this is also the effect of Mashyagh, how exactly does his regret have to do with hiding his face?

- Let me ask again. Would you mind showing your face?

- Well, no... I can't.

- Why not? Doesn't it torment you to distance yourself from your brother or his surroundings? I'd say that by hiding your face, you're rather loudly announcing your intention to distance yourself from them.

- I understand... But that's not the point. I just can't.

Magsarion shakes his head stubbornly in spite of the fact that he himself does not understand the reason. Since I can't force him to do anything, all I have to do is put the facts in order.

Undoubtedly, Magsarion has now gone back twenty years. More precisely, back to the time shortly before the sad demise of Lord Varhran.

At that time, Magsarion - most likely, as now - felt a strong disgust and hatred for the ideal hero, but since he himself did not understand why he felt that way, he decided to distance himself from him as a kind of protective reaction. The decision not to associate with what he does not understand is quite in line with the behavior of the "lonely boy abnormal in his loneliness" that Arma told us about.

Then he denied Lord Varhran: he may have said or even done something unforgivable, and the fact that it was their last parting still gnaws at him-at least, that is my theory.

Indeed, perhaps in Magsarion's eyes everything around him looked like a picture from another world, and the way of life of his brother or the people around him seemed so incomprehensible to him that he simply could not contain his disgust.

Yet he by no means hated all Ashawans as such, including Lord Varhran. This is the essence of his regrets, and his desire to rectify the past is what allowed him to sync up with Mashyagh.

So far, it all adds up. All this is nothing more than my speculation, but it all sounds pretty logical, and I'm sure that if I'm wrong, it's not by much.

But the reason why he hides his face, disregarding the chronological order of events, remains unknown. If Magsarion's regression to his childhood years is due to a desire to redeem himself before Lord Varhran, why hide his face and thereby erect unnecessary walls?

I don't know. Perhaps I misunderstood the Mashyagh effect? Or perhaps Magsarion regrets something entirely different?

Assuming the second version, Magsarion himself does not understand his position. Since he doesn't know what's eating him, it's quite possible, but then any conversation I have with him would be in vain...

No, it simply can't be. I shake my head and banish the unkind thoughts from my mind. The facts are that Magsarion is trying to get close to me now, so what good would it do me if I didn't trust that desire of his?

Whatever the truth, in his heart he is definitely considering crossing the chasm between us. I think the most important thing for me is not to miss this side of him.

For the sake of the epilogue that awaits us in the future. For the miracle I wish for myself.

- That seems to have troubled you quite a bit. If you don't want to show your face, I won't ask you to overpower yourself, you don't have to worry.
- How can I not worry? Why am I wearing this thing and don't want to take it off?
- In that case, why don't we think together? You seem to know a girl named Arma, don't you?
- What's she got to do with it?
- Do you remember if she said anything to you about your looks? Like that she thinks you're cool, or maybe the other way around.

I ask him a little jokingly, but Magsarion suddenly falls silent. After a while, though, he points to the dot below us and asks:

- So you think I'm somewhere on their level? Screw you.

Not quite sure what he means, I notice the figures of Incest and Zurvan below. Two people in the middle of a carefree meadow... The way they walk side by side... Yes, there's nothing to talk about, it's much more like a date.

- It's embarrassing. Don't compare me to them.

Obviously, they're also fighting a very hard battle.

\*\*\*

A man named Zurvan has a lot of nerve in every situation. He is defiant and sassy, idle and willful, but always manages to avoid unnecessary hassle. Perhaps the main reason why so many people dislike him so much is that he embodies a certain injustice.

He is not in the center of the action but only observes the characters from the sidelines, and although he finds other people's weaknesses easy to find, he does not show his own.

Perhaps, such buffoonish behavior can be called cowardice, but it is because of this Zurvan almost never loses his temper. He has the necessary wit for this, and he himself does not intend to change this way of life.

Already this is enough to call such a situation abnormal.

- ...Seriously, what's the matter with you anyway?

With such unaccustomed anger, he pushes his companion lightly on the shoulder. It may seem surprising, but Zurvan always treats women politely. He can not always be called kind in the usual sense of the word, but as a rule, in a bad mood he does not touch them with a finger.

That's why it's a rare sight to see him behave so rudely now. Not to mention the fact that the consequences are totally unexpected.

- Aah!

After receiving a push to the shoulder, Incest doesn't resist the force put into him one bit and immediately falls to the grass. She can't be described as completely feeble, and she's not exactly putting on a cheap act to get a man's attention.

It's just that it came as a complete surprise to her, and so she failed to react. At least, that is what Zurvan thinks, and this inexplicable anomaly puzzles him once again. How is it possible that they are talking to each other in private, and yet she is completely oblivious to what the other person is doing?

- Come on, get up already, you're a pain in the ass.

- ...I'm-I'm sorry. Um...

The man's outstretched hand and the woman's trying to grab onto it dangle in the air, but they never manage to meet. It even resembles a comedic pantomime, but at least Incest is clearly serious. Judging by the fact that she is blushing to her ears and turning away, unable to look at Zurvan, she must be struggling with indescribable embarrassment.

The fact that they wouldn't get anywhere that way, though, didn't change that.

With a heavy sigh, Zurvan finally grabs Incest by the arm and lifts her to her feet.

- Oh!... Uh-oh, thank you.

- You're welcome. Somehow looking at you makes me feel like I'm being held as an idiot.

He was visibly thrown out of his usual rhythm. In some ways, Zurvan is even more discouraged than Incest right now. It's hard to understand why, but in front of this strange girl he can't maintain his usual facade.

Accidentally turning away in annoyance, he meets his gaze with Quinn, who is watching them with great interest from the top of the hill, and this annoys him even more. After sending the strained "Don't look" thought in her direction and thus getting rid of any unnecessary witnesses, he turns to Incest again.

- Anyway, you wanted to talk to me, didn't you? Since you're the one who started it, stop stalling.

- ...H-okay. But I wasn't going to ask you anything very important.

With his head bowed, as if trying to hide under the brim of his hat, Incest begins to speak curtly.

- I wonder what you've been doing for thirteen years. Can you tell me in general terms?

- No problem, though I haven't managed to do any of that. Don't complain if you're not interested.

- ...That's all right. I'm interested in everything that concerns you.

Of course, Zurvan is not so deaf as not to hear in Incest's confession the feelings he has for him. He may be of no use in bed, but he has gained much more experience than some.

She seems quite partial to him - in fact, she treats him like a real messiah. He still finds it strange to hear this from a complete stranger, but in his starry spirit he hadn't paid much attention to the common folk, so now he's willing to admit that this is entirely possible.

From the point of view of Incest, who continued to conduct a kind of guerrilla activity under Mashyana's oppression, the situation surely looks like the return of the commander. It is quite understandable that she accepted it with joy, and now wants to know about the last thirteen years of Zurvan's life.

Since that's the case, all that's left to do is to go along with it, no matter how uncomfortable it might be for him. No matter how one goes about it, it wouldn't be very nice to turn down someone who has struggled in his homeland all the while he's been doing whatever his heart desires.

- Frankly, it wasn't my job to work as a Yazata. Honestly, this whole war of good and evil was getting boring to me, so I decided to live this fortunate second life the way I wanted to.
- ...But you still decided to fight, didn't you? Why's that?
- Partly for the atmosphere, partly as a cover. When I woke up there, the guy next to me wasn't the most understanding type. If I'd said something like, "I'm not your enemy or your ally," I would have killed him on the spot.
- ...I take it you mean him?

Incest nods toward the hill, and Zurvan nods back, noticing the boy's silhouette there.

- Well, yes. But I don't particularly regret it. He's a lost kid in many ways, but I guess I was lucky to meet him.

After all, he's never boring to look at. Even now that he is a child, a creature called Magsarion is Zurvan's greatest entertainment. In a way, he even respects him, sensing in the black knight's perpetually rebellious behavior the ideal to which he aspires.

- ...Do you have any idea why Mashyagh might have done this to him?
- Not really. After all, I didn't even know my little sister had found such a thing. All I can say is that since he was in on it, it's in the bag. We'll just have to give this Mashyagh to Magsarion.
- ...And you trust him. Indeed, as long as he stares his regrets straight in the face, Mashyana can't use his trump card. Then we can probably handle the rest on our own.
- That would be good. Wait, we got distracted. Anyway, it's hard to call me a decent Yazata, so I'm not very well liked for this...

Zurvan then goes on to talk about the events that happened to him over thirteen years. Not only about those events that impressed him, but also about secret matters that should not be discussed with outsiders, and even about everyday life, which to an outsider would seem unimportant.

On all these occasions, Zurvan remained aloof, merely observing. And in the encounter with Quinn when he brought her to the holy kingdom, and in the battle with the lumberjack gang on the star of the dragon's remains, he was above it all, unconcerned about the world's oodles of war between good and evil. It could be said that he never once acted with the same fervor or vector as anyone else, whether enemy or ally.

More specifically, Zurvan has deliberately done everything he can to swim against the tide. If he is called a stubborn man for that, he will not deny it, but that is why he has no regrets... No, he understands that he has decided to become one precisely because he regrets what he has done.

Incest listens to all this with obvious interest. Sometimes he is surprised, sometimes he laughs, and sometimes he recoils... He takes it all in, as if digesting Zurvan's legacy, and then he raises his head and asks.

- ...I wonder what you think of Mashyana?

What a mysterious look she has. The squinted eyes are definitely directed at Zurvan, but at the same time, as if they are facing somewhere far away...

It's oddly unfocused, but it doesn't make a fuzzy impression. It shines with a strange luster that no veil will allow it to cover.

- ...**I lied to her.**

Perhaps that is why Zurvan involuntarily whispers these words. He's surprised himself that he's telling the truth he didn't intend to tell anyone... But the feelings he's already given free rein to continue unabated.

- I have not lived a second of peace with her since the moment I realized I was a star-spirit. We may be brother and sister, but that goes without saying with **Avesta**. For a decade or more, she and I fought hard, got others involved along the way, and it ended up in a grand mess. If you were born in these heavens, you probably know what it was like back then.

- ...Mm-hmm, that was after the tops of good and evil had confronted each other properly. To fill the void, many had awakened to replace them, including on our planet, and it had been a hell of a few years.

- Both these heroes in shining armor and these trashy evil kings disgust me equally. Why do you settle scores and I have to clean up my own backyard? But I didn't have time to complain at the time.

- Really?

- No, you didn't. All I could think about was how to deal with my cheeky little sister. But, you know...

Suddenly Zurvan shuts up, takes a cigarette out of his pocket, takes a drag, and continues in a self-deprecating tone, watching the cloud of smoke.



- I thought: why am I doing this? The Drujvants piss me off, but they only piss me off because of some instinct I can't really understand. Just do it, are we some kind of insects who can't even think with their heads? When I looked at it that way, it immediately began to seem like terrible stupidity to me. Though you and all those who've fought beside me would probably think I was kidding.

- ...No, I think I understand you in some ways. But when exactly did you start thinking that way?

- I'm ashamed to admit it, just before I died. And if I had noticed it earlier, maybe I would have been able to go another way... Apparently, I'm such a person that the most important things are difficult for me.

Zurvan's confusing story, as one would expect from him, is clearly arranged in an order that only he understands. What exactly is the lie that he said at the beginning... It seems that this explanation must be led to first, and Incest understands this and does not hurry him.

- I'm not going to lie, the fact that I only got my eyes open when I was dying is a real shame. And I also thought I was just down because I'd lost. I realized I'd changed internally, but I still resisted it. And because of that...

Zurvan turns to Incest. He doesn't understand why, but he feels it must be said, looking her straight in the eye.

- I lied to her. To my own little sister, who kept telling me with tears in her eyes how glad she was. To the woman who asked me how I felt while she was devouring me... I answered her in the most typical way possible for the idiocy that reigned around me called **Avesta**.

- ...

- "You make me sick. Die."

Zurvan said this deliberately. At the end of a long war with her sworn brother, Mashyana would surely have expected to hear his dying wails of anger and hatred. If only because that is the nature of all Drujvantes: they all believe that the loser must do the will of the victor, and unsightly last moments are a kind of etiquette.

If he had told her that it was nothing, that it shouldn't be like that, that he didn't want to fight her to the last, Mashyana would surely have been disappointed. She would have regarded what was happening as one big foolishness, just like he himself.

And since he could not wish her the same fate...

- I concealed my true feelings. I still regret it.

After whispering this, Zurvan hides his face under the brim of his hat. He has said what he had to, and he can't take the Incest look any further.

- ...You probably think you should have met Mashyana face to face. No matter how she reacted, if she had to lie, at least let you know how you really feel.

- ...Anyway, yes. Of course, that could be explained by my habit of always keeping to myself, but it still left an unpleasant residue. That's why I've since decided to at least never lie. Stupid, huh?

He tries to turn it into a sad joke, but Incest smiles and shakes his head.

- ...No, you're a real hero after all. At least in my eyes... And most likely in Mashyana's eyes.

- You think so? I don't know about you, but Junior's obviously still pretty pissed off.

- ...But that's why you came to end it all, isn't it? You were tossed all over the world, but you came back to heaven in the end. That's all that matters to us.

- That's all that matters to us, is...

Incest speaks as if she is ranking with Mashyana, but after thirteen years of wandering, Zurvan has nothing to contradict her. It is exactly as she says: from the moment he entered the Air Burial Zone, he was ready to put an end to his vendetta with his little sister. He avoided a battle in the holy kingdom because he didn't want to expose his personal problems to so many people, but that also means he's really serious.

- By the way, Zurvan. I've been meaning to ask you something, do you mind?

- What do you want?

Incest turns to him with a kind of strange excitement, and Zurvan only sighs wearily in response to her. If he had to reveal his shameful past to Magsarion, nothing could be done about it because of their pact, and Quinn would be a tolerable conversationalist. But the girl in front of him, abnormal in every sense, came the closest to him in spite of that, and that made him feel somehow uncomfortable.

Even though the most unbearable and mysterious thing about it is that he himself is not out of it...

- You keep saying that Mashyana is your little sister, but she's not, is she? In fact, she's the eldest and you're her little brother.

- Huh? What are you talking about? Screw you, I'm the eldest.

This may seem like a completely insignificant problem from the outside, but to Zurvan, no concession on this issue is appropriate, and his tone grows harsher. Oddly enough, Incest contradicts him with exactly the same unapologetic attitude.

- Nah, you're the youngest, after all. If you don't straighten things out, I won't forgive myself, so keep in mind that Mashyana's the eldest.

- Hey, what are you looking at? You can see that I have more adult dignity!

- ...I don't know if looks matter, after all, you're twins. And anyway, if you have to rely on evidence like that, the answer's a little obvious, isn't it?

- No way - I'm definitely the oldest!

- ...Ah, yeah. Look, you're kind of cute.

- What?!

Incest says this in such an arrogant tone from her older sister that Zurvan can't stand it and pokes her lightly in the shoulder again. This makes her fall to the grass again with incredible ease, as if from an unexpected attack.

- ...You're so violent after all. You should have had a little pity.

- ...I didn't put any effort into it. Are you sure you'll be all right if you fall like that every time?

In her fight with Mashyana, it was obvious that Incest was burning with enthusiasm, but this strange weightless behavior of hers really doesn't inspire much confidence.

It's as if she lives in another world, separated from this one by a thin veil-she can hardly be mistaken for a real person.

- ...No need to worry. Didn't you see how I dealt with Mashyana?

- I saw it. But I don't know what it is, so I can't just accept it. Is that what you want to talk about, by any chance?

Shaking the grass off his butt, Incest contemplates these words for a while, and then looks down.

- ...Sorry, I can't talk about that. But I promise, when it's over, I'll tell you everything.
- Okay, then I'll wait. But if you do, don't die.

He would not forgive her if she died without revealing her secret. Zurvan does not put any other meaning in this, but Incest seems to blossom.

- ...Yes, yes! Don't worry, I'm not going to die myself. That's why I'm with you...
- Isn't it "myself"? You're getting out of character.
- ...Y!
- And by the way, I've been wondering why you're reacting with such a delay.
- ...Ooh!
- Here we go again.

Almost every line from Incest starts with a little pause. Even assuming that she considers Zurvan's every word before answering him, the delay before her reflex reactions looks too unnatural. There is a certain uncomfortableness about it, as if the words were passing through someone else's hands or a great distance away.

What's the big deal here? Zurvan may love to banter with others, but he can't stand being bantered at. As soon as he decides to ask about it directly, a stranger's voice goes off in his head.

"Sorry, Zurvan. Incest has its own circumstances."

- A?

Telepathy - but not Quinn. By sheer force of will it seems like a girl who's about to blow her mind is talking to him.

- So, is that you, Ashozushta! It can't be, hey - so all this time you've been...
- "All the time you've been passing on. And you're good for noticing."

- Fuck you, what were you two thinking about? Hey, where did you run off to?

He turns around too late: The incest is already gone. It's hard to know what her intention was, but you can't be so stupid as not to be able to look your interlocutor in the eye properly and need help talking to him. Zurvan had never been so tricked before, and so it was only natural that he would start gritting his teeth and roughly kicking the ground beneath his feet.

"It hurts! Violence is not the answer!"

- ...You're guilty too, Ashozushta. I hope you're ready to get what you deserve.

"I promise I'll explain everything. But it's almost nighttime, so maybe tomorrow would be better. I think you already know, but I..."

- Can't see in the dark, can you? All right. Damn it!

Unable to vent his anger, Zurvan can only spit and crumple his cigarette.

\*\*\*

Finally, night falls. I was told that Ashozushta was going to talk to us tomorrow morning, and we decided it would be better to wait quietly for her. Haste is a mockery, and given recent developments, it would be more than wise to take every opportunity to rest.

So right now I'd like to go back to sleep, but...

- Why on earth would I sleep with you?

- Because there's only one bed?

- So sleep on the floor.

The masked boy points to the cold floor without any remorse. I don't even know what to say: we've already gone about the third circle, and he's even starting to seem nice to me.

- Listen, Magsarion. Don't you think men should yield any comfort to a lady in such cases?

- This is the first I've heard of it. Don't impose rules on me that you've made up for yourself.

I don't know what rule this unseen world of Magsarion works by, but I can say with certainty that his self-centeredness is even invigorating at first. Somehow I even admire the fact that his utter inability to read the setting was even in these years.

- I see. In that case, I propose a compromise: let's resolve the issue without discriminating on the basis of gender. If we want the same thing, we'll have to fight for it in a fair fight.

- Hmm!

Maybe he sensed something wrong, as he immediately got into a stance, but I just grabbed him by the shoulders and just threw him off the bed. I didn't grab him hard, but I threw him at an angle that would allow him to land, so he wouldn't get hurt.

- Well, good night... Ow.

As soon as I get into bed, however, I feel a hard blow to my back. Magsarion hits me with both feet in a leap, and I roll off the bed with the sheet.

- I told you, you sleep there.

- I don't want to.

Not wanting to lose, I pull the boy down by his leg. Thus begins our bitter struggle for the one and only throne.

- Stop it, don't touch me, you make me sick!

- What a rude young man. Perhaps I should punish you instead of my brother.

- What's brother got to do with it? Get off me already, I'll kill you!

- Please, try it. Come on, come on, why don't you get off?

- Grrrr...

I hold Magsarion's neck with my legs as he thrusts with all his limbs. He pinches and scratches and bites my thighs like some wild cat.

- It hurts, it hurts. That's too much. Stop it, where are you putting your hands, and you're still a child!

- Don't make such vile screams!

- What do you mean "vile", how rude!

This battle goes on for another half hour. What annoys me most about it is that Magsarion refuses to show amusement, embarrassment, and the like. Perhaps my grip really disgusts him, but my pride won't let me let him go so easily, and the situation is slowly becoming stalemated.

But somewhere in my chest I still feel some warmth, all because I can see his stubbornness. It's hard for me to imagine body contact as a method of research, but I'm genuinely glad that he kept me company. His many swear words sound brutal, but there is no outright rejection behind them.

So even without Incest's orders to tame Magsarion as best as possible, I'd like this fiddling to last as long as possible...

The main thing is that I myself feel how precious such moments are.

- Tell me, Magsarion...

Simultaneously exhausted, we decide to sleep together after all, and I turn to the boy. I hug his small back and involuntarily ponder the future that might have been .

- ...What do you want, anything else?

- No, nothing in particular, don't bother.

I realize it's a hypocritical, selfish wish. A self-righteous dream that disregards everything - both his position and the course of the war.

And yet I can't help but ponder it. In some ways I even pray for such a possibility.

May he remain so forever.

## 5

Having missed the invasion of the king of evil, the holy kingdom was plunged into chaos. In time the incident took no more than ten seconds and the damage was close to zero, but it was enough to plunge the citizens accustomed to a quiet life into the abysses of terror.

First of all, it should be noted that everything happened the day after the end of Veretragna. There were still many guests in the capital from all the surrounding lands, and they were all napping after long celebrations. It was like a thunderstorm out of the blue, and precisely because the storm had passed before anyone realized it, no one could relax and rejoice at the unexpected rescue.

Rather, it only increased the anxiety and fear that sooner or later things might happen again. The illusion of peace, in which everyone had hitherto vaguely believed, was shattered, and the powerless citizens, though belatedly, realized once again that they were on the front lines of the war between good and evil.

And so chaos gripped the capital. The night has passed since Mashyana's invasion, but even now many are jostling with one another, loading their belongings into carts and trying to flee out of the city ahead of others.

No one can reason calmly about whether this makes any sense at all. Logically, this is nothing more than a futile effort, and if the king of evil does launch an invasion, there will be nowhere to flee from him.

And yet no one is willing to stay put. If only for a moment longer, if only one step further, everyone is trying to flee from death. The disorderly flight is already beginning to resemble a riot, but the authorities, who would calm the unhappy panic-stricken people, still do nothing.

After all, the Yazatas, who are supposed to serve as the first bulwark of goodness, are in the same chaos.

Quinn, Zurvan, Magsarion. The fact that all three have disappeared along with Mashyana is now known to all, but no one knows what to do about it, and the idle argument continues to this day.

We need to attack the Air Burial Zone to help our comrades-in-arms in trouble - idiot, who would volunteer to go into the very lair of the enemy?

You have to evacuate the civilians first and concentrate on defense - and let all three die? And anyway, are you going to fight here?

One of two things, attack or defend. In both cases, it's blatantly obvious that the holy kingdom, finally showing signs of rebirth, will suffer a serious blow. No, even this is only a naive illusion, and if we reason sensibly, good is doomed. They still have a long, long way to go to face the king of evil.

In that case, perhaps we should choose the third option and run?



Indeed. Now all the Yazata and a good portion of the citizens can still surely flee to a new land. If the enemy knows the location of their camp, it would be wise to relocate it.

Wretched coward, how can we get back on our feet after fleeing from the king of evil a second time?

Make up your mind, take the fight with pride. There will be no other chance to do it!

If pride won wars, things would be a lot easier. Face reality, you fool!

The argument gets harder and harder, time goes on and on, and still no answer. The sacred king, who could solve everything for them, has locked himself in the throne room and won't come out, so this state of affairs is only natural.

Now that someone is even beginning to distrust Sirius, further developments come as a complete surprise to all.

Thin cracks form in the skies of the holy kingdom, over which the sun has barely begun to rise. From the planet's perspective, they are no larger than the eye of a needle, tens of thousands of times smaller than when Mashyana appears, and therefore no one notices them. However, this is nothing more than a matter of zone of influence.

The very act of opening the hole in the heavens and setting up the connection does not change from this, and the power behind it is in no way inferior to that of the king of evil. What's more, the perpetrator of what happened doesn't even think about conceding anything to anyone.

- Well, there you go. I guess I'm too late after all.

Muttering to herself, she looks out at the capital, a woman in armor that seems to be stained with blood.

- M-maybe I shouldn't have been distracted on the way. B-but there's nothing I can do about it. That's the Commandment. Everyone who gets in the way has to be killed, has to be killed.

Underneath the eyes, running back and forth, darkening, frighteningly deep sacks. And the hollow cheeks and pale skin do not make her look like a living person. There is a stubbornness bordering on fanaticism in her, as if she has been engaged in one thing and one thing only, forgetting even to eat.

This woman is like a skeleton knight. Hungry and hungry, thirsty and thirsty. The embodiment of thirst, who goes only forward to get the one thing she needs, discarding everything else. With a comically huge spear on her shoulder, she surveys the hitherto unseen people far below.

- What can I do? I can still catch up with Mashyana. But I can warm up first. Ten, no, seven minutes might be enough... No, it's definitely enough.

Twenty meters to my left of the muttering woman, the anomaly happens again. As if ripping through space with a can opener, a lone man passes through the circular hole.

- Ahhhhhh, you're kidding. I'm too late, after all!

Shaking all around with a thunderous scream, the man nearly faints in agony. His tone is radically different, but the meaning of his words is almost identical to the woman's first retort.

- Scared of me? I'll bet she was! Definitely scared, there's nothing to argue about! Which means I'm stronger!

The next moment he bursts into resounding laughter. The incredible speed with which his mood had changed revealed his bottomless ardor and optimism.

Clad from head to toe in white and blue armor glistening in the morning sun, with two gracefully curved blades in his hands, he resembles a knight from the pages of a fairy tale book. Despite this, he remains a blob of death and stench, with clearly hundreds of millions of deaths to his credit - yet he transforms it all into brilliance.

A haughty way of life that leaves nothing of common sense gives this carefree beauty his special fervor. No matter how many atrocities, no matter how much cruelty he commits, he does not let even a shadow of gloomy impression come near him. After all, he has decided that by allowing himself to be tainted in this way, he will show weakness.

- All right, all right, so you have decided to run, Mashyana? If so, I have to go after her, but first I have to do something about it. Ten, no, seven minutes is enough for me... No, seven seconds!

- S-Shut up.

He halted in a moment, and his gloomy stammer over his reckless reasoning, which he could only take for the ravings of a madman. A moment, and the glances of the blue and scarlet knights split apart, colliding in the middle.

- O-your yelling is making my head buzz. Shut your... No, I will shut you up myself.

Together with the strength of herself, capable of piercing all things, the woman lunges with her spear. Absurdly straight, not deviating a hair's breadth, the sting of lust heads for its target by the shortest route to it.

The man's blades, on the other hand, draw a spiral capable of wrapping around all things. Without dodging or blocking the spear approaching at near-light speed, the spinning blade of the fervor coils around it like a viper.

Both are completely serious in their intent, ready to kill their opponent on the spot without any hesitation. You might think they are old acquaintances, but there is no friendship between them.

No, perhaps that is what friendship means to them.

- It's been a long time, Zairiched. How long has it been? Ah, never mind, you were obviously thinking what I was thinking anyway. Did you come for Mashyana, too?

Punching each other in full force, the two knights sprawl apart and turn to face each other. The man in blue is still holding on happily, but the woman in red smirks with a sense of superiority.

- D-don't compare me to yourself, Taurvid. I-I came here first, so I'm stronger.

- Wha-?!

This statement shocked the man, but he still gave the impression of a well-bred nobleman. He squints slightly and asks a question, as if checking something out.

- Since we parted ways with Bahlavan, I have killed nine planets and everyone who lived on them. What about you? Answer me now, honestly, like I did!

- N-nine?!

- Exactly. If you've killed more and faster than me, all I have to do is admit you're right.

- I-I only... seven...

- Ooh-ha-ha-ha-ha!

The man clutches his stomach and laughs, throwing his head back. At the sight of the joy and innocence with which he does this, the average man in the street would surely immediately succumb to his charms.

That is, of course, if the average man did not know his circumstances.

- There's your answer. I'm stronger!
- Shut up, dummy!
- Speak up, you moron!

Once again, the straight and the curve collide. Scarlet and blue knights, whose strength is absolutely equal, begin a deadly battle right in the sky of the holy kingdom.

Their speed, their precision-the greatest cruelty available only to the greatest of evils-blooms in full bloom. In mere seconds they exchange tens of thousands of fatal blows, yet they do not spill a drop of blood or even exhale. The density of their techniques, dividing each second into smaller and smaller fractions, is direct proof of their unfathomable endurance.

The limitless ferocity of Slaughter and Death - anyone they encounter must be slain with all their might. In pursuit of the throne of the strongest, for the sake of which they are willing to exterminate all life, they have sworn to the dream and become perpetual engines.

They will not stop. They cannot stop. They are locusts. Monsters of war.

For five hundred years they have been furrowing the cosmos and destroying everything in their path to get the head of the third king of evil. You might say they think of nothing but reaching new heights.

- And you are strong, much stronger than before, Zairiched. But mind you, I am stronger!
- Y-you are strong too, Taurvid. But know that I am stronger!

Like Bahlavan, locusts do not attack someone who does not acknowledge their presence. They care too much that any semblance of an ambush will rob it of its purity, and it will be impossible to know who is stronger that way.

That is why both Zairiched and Taurvid prefer not to kill those who do not participate in the battle. Proof of this is that the spear piercing the luminaries and the blades slicing through the starry wind have still had no effect on their surroundings. The force of the self, which transcends

the laws of physics, leaves the attackers with only their own power, depriving them of the shockwave.

However, this cannot go on forever. A battle between two Daevas of special rank inevitably produces an impression of unimaginable destruction. There are not five people in the entire universe who would be indifferent to such a threat.

And so those who pay attention to the monstrous battle high in the sky begin to emerge.

One, two, a dozen, a hundred - the sense of fear spreads wider and wider, like circles on water.

All the inhabitants of the holy kingdom, men and women, old men and children, turn their eyes to the dance of the locusts...

- That's unfortunate. We seem to have somewhat uncomfortable guests.

The somewhat cheerful, somewhat lovey-dovey cooing voice belongs to Roxanne. At the moment she is in the throne room, where no one is allowed to enter, and is standing casually beside Sirius.

First of all, Roxanne's behavior raises questions about her strange nonchalance. It is obvious that she is talking about the Locusts of Swiriosity, but there is not a drop of concern in her.

Rather, it is as if what is happening amuses her as she whispers to her sacred king:

- What would you have me do? I think this is a rather serious trouble.

- Of course, we'll take the fight. If we do not endure such a trifle, we have nothing to count on henceforth.

Sirius answers, continuing to sit on his throne and staring at one point. A majestic will shines in his cold eyes, as if the real enemy lurks just at that point.

- In that case, I too will go out to them.

- Are you sure?

- Oh you, what strange questions you ask. Have you forgotten that I am Roxanne's own person now?

The girl closes one eye meaningfully, and the wrinkles on Sirius' forehead smooth out. It's not much of a change, but in his case it's an extremely rare smile from the heart.

- Accept my thanks. And pass it on to your master.
- How right you are... In fact, I like that about you.

Sirs silently stands up and walks to the exit, and Roxanne follows him with a smile. From her easy gait it may seem that she is going to play, but there is no doubt that the future does not bode well for them.

Zurvan and Magsarion... Now that they are stripped of their two trump cards, they are preparing to fight two Daevas of special rank. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest crisis that has occurred in the holy kingdom in the last twenty years.

- By the way, moron.
- What do you want, dummy?

Zairiched and Taurvid continue their struggle, having already exchanged tens of millions of blows, but still showing no signs of fatigue. Their equilibrium cannot be broken so quickly, and therefore their battle, which has reached its highest intensity, is already known to the entire population of the holy kingdom.

- Of course, the winner will have the right to fight Mashyana, but I thought we should clean up first. It's distracting, I just can't get enough of it.
- H-okay. I want to get a good look at how you die. T-so we really should put everything else away first.

The spear and blades collide once more instead of a handshake, and both eyes turn in the other direction.

They turn to the noisy mass of ashawans. People and animals, insects and plants, it doesn't matter.

If it is alive, if it is looking this way, then the gong has already sounded. Anyone who stands in their way is an enemy to be defeated in a battle for the title of strongest.

And how else to solve this problem except by killing them?

Right now, the locusts are reciting their oath at the top of their voice. As if declaring to the world: I and you are here and now...

- Death to all who cross our paths!

The spear and blades make a million scarlet flowers bloom in one motion.

To say they could wipe out an entire planet in a matter of minutes was no exaggeration. For them, it is nothing more than a daily routine.

## **Chapter 7: Permeating Void (Part 1-3)**

### **1**

Ferdows had a dream. He sincerely aspired to an ideal, quite inherent in anyone who was born ashawan, raised as a man, and accepted into the yazatas.

To become a hero. To keep the flame of justice in his soul alive, to protect the weak and subdue the strong. Always looking forward, but not forgetting those who stand behind and side by side with him - to become the one who will win the perfect victory of the good.

It's like a children's fairy tale incarnate...

Ferdows wanted to become a miracle worker, capable of making the impossible possible, and he believed he could still become one.

Never once did he feel pride because of his outstanding talents. Indeed, his skills could be said to be "slightly above average," but he understood that he was objectively no different than many other people.

And yet... no, that's why any success would bring him the highest glory.

He is not like those chosen by heaven from the beginning. Because of his unassuming and mediocre nature, Ferdows is well aware of what the underprivileged of this world are experiencing. He knows how precious the unremarkable everyday life they live is.

And so the "legend" that must stand in their defense should be embodied by the lower class. Of course, his gratitude and respect for Varhran are in no way inferior to others, but Ferdows is not about to blindly worship the hero of the past, who is almost idolized to this day.

For Varhran, who soared to unreachable heights and shone a dazzling light on everyone, is dead. Such is the reality, however brutal, and so he believes that one cannot rely on the idea of a genius or the chosen one of heaven. By continuing to make the same decisions, they will only get one-size-fits-all results.

It is precisely because the likes of him swear to become heroes that this is the point. If he sincerely follows this path, persevering with more and more effort, sooner or later he will reach his goal...

He was able to believe this solely because of "him".

Magsarion... The fierce black knight that, as the hero's younger brother, was still not chosen by the heavens, but didn't let that stop him and went his own way.

Ferdows by no means approves of his heartlessness and ruthlessness, which is so difficult to call the behavior of a Yazata, but at the same time he is unwilling to go along with his feelings and mindlessly condemn them. Magsarion is just like the underdog of this world, shedding rivers of blood to fulfill his own ideal. To compensate for his own mediocrity, he has shouldered burdens that would crush anyone, yet he continues to stand on his own two feet.

How, then, can he condemn such beliefs? The entire holy kingdom now rests on the accomplishments of Magsarion, which means those who wish to challenge his hell on earth must show equal determination and achievement. To rebuke a black knight with mere language and pretty words seems to him overly shameless hypocrisy.

This means that for Ferdows, Magsarion is both a bad example and a point of reference. The same kind of born mediocrity who decided to become a "legend" anyway. In order to realize the ideal that lives in his heart, one must stand side by side with Magsarion, ahead of the others.

To stand side by side? Catch up? Yes, it is possible, for they began in the same way.

His path is winding and thorny, filled with such madness and darkness that he cannot walk it, but Magsarion has proven that even he who is not chosen by the heavens can prove himself. Which means he can be unafraid and follow his own path.

Finally, he decided that when they became equals, he would say to him, "Leave it to me. Just sit back and watch me do it."



To which the latter should reply to him, "Don't get conceited. But you intrigue me, go ahead and show me."

He understands that Magsarion will remain Magsarion forever, and others will not change him. And yet he believes that if he is approached by one who has similarly climbed to such heights from the lowest reaches, he will surely hear him.

A talent like Zurvan is unlikely to fit. The ardent Samluch is already in conflict with him, and Arma, on the other hand, is more likely to be afraid of it. Finally, it will be difficult for Quinn to act on his own volition because of his Commandment.

That's why he is the only one left. He alone can barely keep the menace called Magsarion in check and thus contribute to the victory of the good.

Strong men will stand in pairs. The fierce and holy blades, born mediocre but earning their reputations through their own strength.

Even if they did not become divine blades like Varhran, if they still managed to become universal heroes in the true sense of the word, then...

He believed it would be very, very cool, and that the pursuit of such a dream was worth risking his life for.

However...

- Death to all who cross my path!

Now more than ever, Ferdows understands his own helplessness. Ruthless reality insists that he is no protagonist in the story, but merely a minor character who has only to fall.

The invasion of the evil king Mashyana, the Quinn group that disappeared with her... Before the dust has even settled, two Daeva of special rank have appeared.

The infamous Locusts of the Ferocious... All Yazatas know how dangerous they are. As champions of good, they could not stand idly by, and so more than a hundred of their comrades rushed to the defense of the commoners, but they were all crushed.

Ferdows didn't even have time to figure out what kind of attack they had suffered. At the same time as something flashed, all of his comrades were transformed into small pieces of meat hanging in the air.

Even he himself was shredded into mincemeat and hanging in the sky like an ugly salute. Just like the unfortunate girl he recently killed by misunderstanding...

- Marika...

You were hurt, weren't you? Were you bitter? Unbearably hurt and sad?

Falling surrounded by his own remains, Ferdows, of whom only his head remains, feels overwhelming shame, regret, and remorse to the point of madness.

Why didn't Marika say she hated me? "No forgiveness for you, be damned"-why didn't she blame it all on the talentless yazata?

Strictly speaking, he didn't speak to her after her death, but by taking over all of Marika's memories and personality, Frederica definitely became herself. And so the words spoken to her definitely expressed her true feelings.

"Fer, Fer," Marika smiled cheerfully. "It hurts, it's sad," Marika wails.

Her cries of "HELP, HELP" still echo in his ears.

And it's not that I didn't help you, but I even killed you by declaring you an abominable enemy.

Without a shred of doubt, ruthlessly killed on the spot according to **Avesta's** instinct.

Even proud as a fool, calling it justice and good, while the innocent girl sank into the abysses of despair.

There was no excuse for it. More than anything, he cannot forgive himself, his own insignificance.

"May there be no more men like me in the world... That next time you will help, that you will protect the others."

And yet her pleas boiled down to just that. She wished that he, having already made a fatal mistake, would not make it again.

Marika, Marika... Oh, how condescending and noble and strong you are. A stream of tears and blood begins to flow from Ferdows' eyes.

He can only redeem himself by meeting her expectations. If he does not become the great blade that saves all Ashavans, so that Marika's misfortune may never be repeated, he will cease to understand what she died for.

One of the many senseless mistakes of a talentless young man... Marika's death cannot be anything like that.

As he returned from the star of dragon remains and watched Veretragna, Ferdows thought that this was how he ended his doubts. He would not let anyone else slip through his fingers again. He believed his resolve was so hot that it could change the fate of creation itself.

- But in the end, it ended... like this?!

He achieves nothing, saves no one - he disappears like some garbage.

Perhaps that is ultimately the fate of a young man named Ferdows. Now he's not even entitled to a word of apology.

Rushing toward the ground on the will of gravity, shattering into small pieces his skull.

Spreading slop, his brain losing its function.

A moment before, Ferdows experiences self-deprecation.

Marika, if you could at least hate me, perhaps I could give up all hope and find the path I deserve...

My own cowardice, shifting blame in my last moments. Realizing that just such ugly thoughts could bring the wrath of Marika from the other world, he feels a strange satisfaction that he is not really capable of more.

And so... further developments may be a rebuke to Marika - or perhaps a curse left for her.

- ...A...

Ferdows is alive. Lost consciousness for a few seconds, perhaps minutes... He doesn't know that for sure, but he's still not dead, but lying in the middle of the main street of the capital, arms outstretched. Even his body, which was simply destroyed, is still intact, even if it is wounded.

The fact that he can't move a finger from the pain in his gut proves once again that he's alive... With difficulty trying to think with his barely working head, he suddenly remembers.

- I see... today is Monday.

A day on which his ability to regenerate is heightened. His Commandment draws seven ideals, one of which, by sheer coincidence, saved him by a hair's breadth from ruin.

Would you call that a great stroke of luck? Sick, perhaps? Ferdows rather feels some absurdity in it, feeling perplexed, close to anger.

Regeneration has never been such an impressive ability. An essentially undignified life that cannot be cut short by murder is a hallmark of drujvantes, and there is little compatibility with ashavans. Because of this, Ferdows considers this day "unlucky," just a chance to go for any recklessness.

Indeed, regeneration is unlikely to be strong enough to bring him back to life from the state of fine dust he was turned into by a special rank daeva blow, backed up by the strength of himself.

But then what allowed him to survive? Though the Commandment is at the heart of it, the reason for such an obvious difference remains unclear, but even thinking about it now is too tiresome for him...

- What difference does it... make...

The indifferent words gush out of Ferdows' throat along with the blood. Everything is too much for him right now, and the reality, unwilling to obey his expectations, is pressing in from all sides.

Do you want me to get up anyway, Marika?

Will you keep me awake until I've fulfilled our Commandmentss, fighting tirelessly?

Ah, of course, I'd love to do it myself, but alas, I'm only a weakling. I cannot live up to your expectations.

Even if I stand up, the best I can do is to fail in disgrace again, and I will only tarnish your good name. So leave me alone, forget about me, for surely there will be another hero more worthy of you...

He tries to blacken himself from his gut, but in spite of this, his chest is inflamed with bursting emotions.

- Screw you, screw you, you bastard...

He howls with his own pity. Screaming amidst the storm of regret that soaks into his very soul.

Why do I cover myself in such shame, but still can't give up the dream? Why do my clenched teeth almost split with righteous anger, and the hand still clutching the sword burns with fighting spirit?

I will lose. I cannot win. I am nothing more than a random stone on the sidewalk. Digging in the ground, not chosen by heaven.

I'm already so disappointed in myself that I can't go any further. I don't care what happens to a nobody like me.

But the memory left in my heart, the prayer of Marika, who revealed her soul, does not let me escape responsibility.

So there is only one thing left to do. No matter how much pain and hardship I may have to endure, I will, by all means, destroy everything that defames Marika's dream. Let everything that awaits me in the future be dedicated to that goal alone.

- I will be... a hero!

Before Ferdows, who is on his feet and has made a new promise, the Locust of Ferdows descends to the ground. Shrouded head to toe in silvery blue armor, a dazzlingly handsome man with two crooked blades in his hands.

He appears radiant and happy, as clear as the morning sun, blowing away the stench of the capital's ruins.

- You are strong! I see it in you, call yourself.

- Sirius... However, you don't have to remember.

- ...Huh?!

Ferdows shudders in astonishment as he hears a stern voice from behind him. The two men stand in the middle of the corpse-laden main street while he lies between them.

The holy king continues the sentence in a tone that does not hide his emotions.

- You are going to die here and now anyway.

- Fha!

From the smiling Taurvid begins to emanate the heat and power of himself, staining everything around him with flames of ecstasy and fervor.

The battle to the death with the mighty of this world is the most unsurpassed pleasure, equal to which cannot be found in the whole world. That is why the locusts even feel love for them, even if they go the way of killing all living things. Cheekiness, hubris, it's all more than welcome- nothing makes their hearts flutter as much as a vivacious prey.

Ferdows had no idea that Sirius would come to the front, but events unfolded without any interest in his opinion.

- I may be a foolish king, but I am a king nonetheless. The first thing to do is to observe the rules of decorum.

One step faster than the approaching Taurvid, Sirius makes his first move. And it looks as befitting a holy king as can be: an act comparable to a miracle.

## 2

It can be compared to an instantaneous earthquake. At the same time as Sirius plunges his sword into the ground, there is a sound like a million automatic switches.

Upon witnessing such an act, only Taurvid is able to realize its exact effect. For Ferdows this skill is beyond his comprehension, and the others did not even feel it.

That's because right now... all the people in the holy kingdom, the animals, the plants, the flowers-all the living things, with very few exceptions, are asleep.

- So you're not likely to lay a hand on them. In the end, though, that's just worthless Daeva pride... If your situation worsens, you can always discard it.

The Locust of Ferocity does not attack those who do not feel its presence. To those who seek the title of strongest, killing is nothing more than the result of a contest of strength, and unless this fundamental condition is met, they will not take the life of even the tiniest insect.

In this regard, Sirius' move may indeed be called the best way to protect his subjects. He himself shows no pride in this, and no mercy or warmth can be discerned in his grim countenance, but as king he has certainly made the right decision.

On a planet steeped in violent silence, the young man who feels like an outsider wriggles and opens his mouth with a twist of his neck.

- Ahem! Your... majesty...

- Ferdows? It seems the influence of ■■■■■■ has a weaker effect on you... Hmm, really, this world can't be fixed anymore.

- What... are you...

The king's cold words seem to be blocked by a strange noise, and he can't hear them in their entirety. Perhaps it is the hazy state of his mind from the injury, or perhaps it is something else. The truth remains unclear, but Ferdows brushes such thoughts aside as irrelevant. He is more concerned with the danger Sirius is putting himself in.

- I too... no, I will do it! Your majesty, please, give in to me...

- Be silent. Who are you talking to with that tone of voice?

- But...!

- You are told to know your place, soldier. Don't forget, this is not your fight.

Sirius rudely stops the cries of his subordinate, who barely manages to hold back his tears. In no way does he consider Ferdows' will or circumstances, but only ruthlessly pushes him aside and doesn't even turn around. Perhaps this can be called abdication in the name of protection, but it cannot be called humane behavior.

- I have no time for the mortal's appeals. If you keep stirring the air, I'll execute you on the spot.

- ...Aah!

After telling Ferdows, who was speechless, just that, and immediately losing interest in him, Sirius turns his dim eyes to the other side. Certainly to the biggest threat of the moment, the Daeva of the special rank of Taurvid.

The locust himself, however, does not reciprocate, but looks around as if he were walking down the street. With a slight smile that shows genuine interest, he leisurely steps to the side and looks into the face of the girl in front of the collapsed house.

Then he suddenly drops his foot centimeters from her head.

- ...Funny! So that's your Commandment?

Apparently, he tried to follow Sirius. He kicked the ground with his foot and literally caused an earthquake, but the girl didn't make a sound, continuing to sleep.

This means that the dream is caused by some kind of witchcraft, and she could probably sleep for ages until she is awakened by whoever put her to sleep. Taurvid lets out an impressed whistle and turns his head toward Sirius again.

- A contest to see if I can wake them up with my own powers would also be interesting, of course, but it seems there is a faster option. Am I right in assuming that all I have to do is kill you?

- If you can do it.

- I'll try... But first accept my praise, Sirius. As a mark of respect for your skill, I will answer any question if I can.

With a cheerful smile, Taurvid relaxes his offer. He carries himself as though he were a crony, and though some might call this the greatest disrespect, Sirius does not raise an eyebrow.

- ...Desire, then. First of all, I wish you'd get the hell out of here, but I don't think you will. In that case, let me ask you straight out. Why did you come here?

- A?

Taurvid tilts his head, not understanding the meaning of the question. But Sirius pays no attention to it and continues.

- Details, daeva. What were you thinking, what logic did you follow, what means did you use, and why are you standing here now? That's not a difficult question.



- Ah, I see, is that what you mean?

Accepting the explanation, Taurvid nods and gives his answer.

- I don't know how many rumors about me have reached you, but right now my main target is Bahlavan's head. However, he has been waiting for me for five hundred years, and I want to meet him in full dress, and for this I am gaining experience. Mashyana came here, didn't she?

- She did. So she was your prey to begin with?

- Exactly. Mashyana is the star spirit of my home world, but we lost contact when I was cast out, and that's why I can't track her by scent. Unless, of course, she makes her own move.

This means that the invasion of Mashyana was the beginning. When the huge creature starts to move, the others can smell it. It emits a scent. That's what the locusts came after her.

Even though they ended up splitting up.

- I don't know what happened to it, but it left quite a trail. So I can follow the rest of the scent for a while, and you can serve as my warm-up. Are we clear?

- More than clear. You've calmed me down.

- Oh, with what?

Taurvid still does not understand why Sirius asked him all the details. He had promised to grant his wish, so he answered him properly, but the cause and circumstances of the locust invasion did not seem to him to be something that should be asked under the circumstances.

Moreover, when he received the answer, he calmed down, causing even more bewilderment. What could it be that Sirius found "reassuring"?

While Taurvid is in doubt, the holy king declares, as if mocking him:

- I know now that it was not the work of Nadare. That's all I was worried about, and you don't really matter.

- ...

Terrific abuse. To hear the Locust of the Ferocious treated like that, and not just by anyone, but by the Locust of the Ferocious herself, is beyond madness. Taurvid has never seen such impudence before, and so he bursts into flames in an instant.

Not anger, but joy, which is about to incinerate even himself.

- Ooh-ha-ha-ha, die!

- You die here.

Before the spinning curved blades can outline the arc of death, Sirius leaps straight toward them.

Quickly - but not only that.

The technique, the breathing, the decision to attack in a moment of enemy confusion, and even teleporting a super-short distance. It all adds up to one stunning interception of initiative that could even be called flawless. A flawless approach that any martial arts adept envisions as his ideal, but is unable to achieve even after a lifetime of training.

This is why his opponent cannot even comprehend what is happening and will be killed by the king's blade.

Under normal circumstances, however, locusts are creatures that defy the logic of the battlefield.

Sirius' beam fails to reach its target, cleaving only the air. Such a result is physically impossible, but before there is a chance to wonder about the cause of this phenomenon, another anomaly occurs.

The azure blades outline an arc that kills even the sound of the air being cut--with a silence that might be called the doldrums of the universe. From the back of Sirius, a wave of self-power approaches his neck, capable of shattering the stars themselves.

He blocks it without any difficulty. He swings for the previous blow with all his might, but rather takes advantage of the centrifugal force, turns around and attacks back. It looks as if he's been anticipating all along, and there's exactly nothing unnecessary to be seen in his movement.

Moreover, he combines this with a frightening equanimity. He's not stupid enough to attack a Daeva of special rank head-on, but he takes his weight to the side and translates that into a counterattack.

It was an exact repeat of the move he'd demonstrated in the Veretragna arena against Magsarion. No, this time it was even more refined, even faster, as if its subtlety knew no bounds.

Taurvid's swing also showed diabolical precision, but compared to Sirius, it could only be described as a mudfight. In pure fighting power, however, the former retains an unimaginable advantage.

As a result, the two are equal. Despite the fact that only a few seconds have passed since the start of the battle, the situation is already beginning to look stalemated.

The killing moments follow one after another. The incessant sound of clashing blades.

Repeatedly, a skirmish on the cusp of death that grows a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand times more fierce.

Taurvid laughs out loud, while Sirius maintains a frowning silence. Both of them are still unharmed, and the fact that they continue to use more and more advanced techniques demonstrates their superior form.

There is some mystery in this. Yes, locusts are perpetual motion, but why is Sirius able to move like this despite his limited stamina?

Willpower and life experience must be abundant. His finely honed martial prowess is skillfully combined with the gifts of stellar spirit, and this maximum efficiency certainly elevates him to superhuman levels.

However, this is by no means enough to explain everything. The techniques of both sides of the fierce battle are overly extreme and exaggerated, and Sirius has a kind of special internal combustion engine... You might call it an inexhaustible heart.

Ferdows is almost incapable of seeing the confrontation before his eyes, but understands at least that. And soon he notices something strange.

- It is...

A beetle falls to the ground next to him. It is followed by a sparrow, then a crow, and soon it is as if rain begins to pour down from the heavens.

It's not that they passed out because of Sirius's first move. In fact, they all died before they even crashed to the ground. To some extent, birds are capable of flying even in their sleep, and since all winged ones have a high compatibility with Wohu Mana, there should be no exceptions, and yet...

It was as if a tribute had been collected from them all. It is as if a fiercely fighting holy king is imposing a tribute on them that must be paid... Gradually, an ominous picture unfolds before Ferdows.

The trees growing along the street begin to crack and split. The flowers wither, the grass shrivels, and the sleeping people one by one take their breath away.

And it doesn't stop there. It is a global phenomenon: all the Ashawans living on the planet give up their lives.

To whom exactly are they giving their lives, there is no doubt now.

- Stop it... Why are you doing this, Your Highness! You are the leader of good. A man known to be a faithful friend of a hero!

A hoarse voice continues to cry out for callousness and ruthlessness, wiping out those who should be protected, but the "holy king" pays no attention to this, continuing to fight.

Why he alone remains the exception, Ferdows does not understand, but he is profoundly indifferent.

He must be stopped. If he is not stopped... But no matter how much he grinds his teeth, it doesn't look like the situation will change for the better. Leaving Ferdows sprawled on the ground, the fighters move to another battlefield.

- Goddamn... Stop, goddamn!

Digging his hands into the ground, the powerless youth tries to follow them.

But he does so too slowly, and the distance between them only grows farther.

- I see you have interesting methods. From the outside it looks like solidarity, but I'm not sure if I'm right. What do you think?

Continuing to deliver one lightning strike after another, Taurvid asks the question in an enthusiastic voice. He also noticed what was going on around him, and realized that Swirios was the cause.

- Glorious, such efficiency saves strength - anyway, if you die, nothing can save them. And if the result is the same, it will be easier for me to deal with all of you at once myself. Two questions still haunt me, though!

As if to the rhythm of his words, his left blade soars upward... Sirius dodges it with his torso and silently blocks the right blade that comes at him from the side.

This exchange, for which there is no counting, does not even think of weakening. Both their swords and their behavior can be called complete opposites, similar only in their unwillingness to stop.

- First, I cannot understand the condition of your Commandments. I'm guessing there's a star spirit involved, but how do you repay it yourself? Considering your first trick, you've got a lot of power, but in the end you're still just a representative. You seem to me to have a little too much power!

- What kind of fool would discuss the secrets of his powers with his enemy?

- Ah-ha-ha, really! But you should know anyway, I love talking to strong opponents!

The curved blades head toward Sirius from either side, as if to envelop him in an embrace. Swirios retreats at the last moment and narrowly escapes the deadly scissors, but Taurvid moves closer and closer anyway, laughing.

- Come on, tell me. What is it to you!

He seems to be mocking, but his attack grows fiercer and fiercer without limits. Besides, even his very question hits the bull's-eye.

Absolute power over all life on the planet is the power of the star spirit. It is true of the petrifying Kaikhosru, and it is true of the unclean Mashyana: how to deal with their subordinates is up to them alone.

For this reason, both the putrefaction and Sirius's obedience are essentially a subspecies of power. However, needless to say, he is only human. In essence, he remains only a "representative" of Wohu Mana, and his disposition of his subordinates' lives can be considered an abuse of power.

Even given the star-spirit's current hibernation, he will not forgive such an abuse of power. Therefore, Taurvid guesses that without some sort of retribution such a thing would be impossible, and yet Sirius shows no desire to respond.

- All right, you don't want to talk, let's try it this way.

Taurvid begins spinning both blades like a juggler. Not about to miss this opportunity, Sirius rushes in to attack, and the locusts meet him with a blow that is strikingly different from the previous ones.

- ...Whew!

Spreading scarlet... After a moment's crossing there is a scratch on Sirius's cheek. It's not a full-blown wound, but one false move would cost him his head.

Waiting for the enemy's attack, deflecting it to the side and striking back from the blind spot is none other than a favorite tactic of Sirius himself. Considered the epitome of ferocity, the daeva of special rank wields a blade of calculation.

- Don't look so surprised; I've seen so much of you, I'd remember it if I wanted to. Your sword is so beautiful, of course, I would want to copy it.

He found it beautiful. That is why he imitates it. Taurvid states this with a broad smile as if it were self-evident.

It most likely took Sirius a lifetime to achieve such mastery after grueling training that made him sick with blood, and he managed to do it from memory.

- I wouldn't call him perfect just yet, though. I didn't look on this planet for nothing; it would make a great souvenir for Bahlavan.

"I am grateful to you, so happy to be stronger that I almost cry"... Holding back tears of gratitude, the locusts show their main skill. It can no longer be called ordinary plagiarism.

The blue-blades galloping with joy are a mirror image of Sirius. Like a doppelganger whose encounter promises death, he strikes at the original's personality with blow after blow. Not rising to his level, but striving even higher.

- Is that it? No? How about this? A-ha-ha - how many variations, how interesting!

But the main absurdity is that it has nothing to do with any special skills.

It's not the Commandment or the power of ego. Just talent. Talent and experience.

A beast of war, year after year soaking up blood and death cries, climbing higher and higher. The difference between their attitude of strength and madness is too great.

- Since I've learned your tricks, you won't mind if I become you, will you? Then let's do this. I'll get to know you as well as I can hit you with my next punch!

After stating a completely illogical decision, Taurvid strikes an exaggeratedly spectacular pose. The fact that he fights with two blades makes them fundamentally different, plus it remains mere imitation, but even now his perfection is quite comparable to Sirius.

- In exchange for this, if I suddenly miss, let the imitation disappear! How's that for a game? Really, my heart flutters, it's a thrill, let's go, Siriu-s-s!

Whereupon the lightning blades first inflict a deep wound on the sacred king. Intoxicated by the scattered blood splatter... the locusts simultaneously emit a thunderous scream.

- Uh-oh! I see, so that's what it's all about! What Commandment, do you... really remember them all?!

- It's all right for a king to do that.

Sirius, who has gone into a counterattack without even thinking of the wound, realizes that his secret has been exposed. For this reason he makes no further attempt to hide it.

Just now Taurvid has used the Temporal Commandment to become a copy of Sirius, he has even taken his contents. Thanks to an absurd condition whereby a hit promises success and a miss promises doom.

This is unlike the emptiness of the murderers, but the locusts also live by a single desire. The incessant pursuit of power and the eternal search for strong opponents. As long as nothing contradicts this, they may well accept any Commandment.

As a result, the Commandment of Sirius was exposed to the white light. More specifically, the true nature of the unbearably heavy responsibility that sacred kings pass down from generation to generation.

All those who live on the planet Wohu Mana... Every insect, every flower without exception-all their lives are stored in Sirius's memory without a trace. In the smallest detail, perfectly-right down to the appearance and name of each person.

- Honestly, how can you do that in your head? Don't you think that's something a human being should not be able to do?

- What of it? A king should not compare himself to mere mortals.

Taurvid does not hold back his admiration and a good deal of amazement, but Sirius answers him with stony confidence.

He has never felt any hardship because of it. He has never grown weary of the burden, has never grown weary of the difficulty; he has only understood that it is his duty, and therefore it is his fate to carry the burden.

That is why he is entitled even to the power of the starry spirit. As he said, the king is above men, and therefore, even as a man, he is in part one with the star-spirit.

In front of a similar way of being, Sirius Taurvid interrupts his attack for the first time. His heart still burns with a thirst for battle, but he speaks to him in such a gentle voice as if he were about to melt.

- I see now... And yet there is still one mystery. I'd say it's even less clear now.

- ...

- Look, Sirius, I don't mean to belittle what's driving you, but don't you think it's strange to fight me with the power of an entire planet? Is that something you don't want to talk about? Don't you think?

Indeed, the locust who destroyed many stars couldn't help but talk about it. The facts are that he knows the sum total of the power of the holy kingdom that was once a distant and savage planet.

At least now, even with all the lives of the planet united to one, they are no match for the Locusts of Ferocity. However, Sirius is still in no hurry to reveal his secret... and Taurvid nods with an interested look and assumes the imitator pose again.

- Good, good, then let's try again. Now I'll strike you in the heart... and if I hit, I'll know the answer again, and if I miss...

- Show me what you can really do.



Even Taurvid can't help but open his eyes at being ripped off. To make such a demand of a locust, obliged to fight every man he encounters to the fullest, seems simply inappropriate.

Yet Sirius arrogantly asks for it, even while covered in blood from head to toe.

He declares that to him he must have even more authority than the fate of creation itself.

- A man like you would have been killed a hundred times over by Varhran. I don't have time to get my feet wet over a small fry.

Such a proud tone makes Taurvid bend to his knees and burst into loud laughter. Obviously, he is so delighted that he almost rolls on the ground, struggling to catch his breath.

- ...I see, I see - then let's do this! But I'd like to get rid of any unnecessary misunderstandings. I swear I wasn't going to hold back at all. It's just a matter of combinability - I just can't use those techniques at the same time.

- I don't care. Attack me.

- It's not a question of... Well, I've already given myself a condition. If it's okay with you, I'll still do it.

The promise went into effect in the blink of an eye. As the locusts had declared, he would either strike the sacred king's heart or be blocked.

The outcome would determine whether the mystery of Sirius or the diabolical technique of Taurvid would be revealed. Whatever immeasurable mystery they may be hiding, it is unlikely that they can perfectly foresee any twist of fate...

- Let us begin.

Perhaps when this is all over, someone will be able to remember this moment.

To remember that this particular day, this particular fork, may have been of great significance.

### 3

Samluch is confused. Even a few blocks away from the scene of Sirius and Taurvid's battle, she wonders only "Why?"

The townspeople suddenly asleep, their precipitous exhaustion, even the fact that she alone is the exception...

Yes, indeed, all these mysteries are more than puzzling. Now, however, there's another mystery that's really bugging her.

- H-don't run back and forth, you're annoying.
- Shut up you, your babbling is much more annoying!

The dust from the King of Evil's invasion hasn't even settled yet, and the Locust of Ferocity, Zairiched, shows up after her.

Samluch dodges all of her fearsome attacks with his spear and sharps her in return, but this courage is only apparent. From the moment of their encounter until now, she has wondered about one thing and one thing only.

How is it that she struggles but keeps up with her as an equal?

A scarlet spear approaches her, but she barely dodges it again. She may not feel the shockwave-perhaps because of the enemy's Commandment-but she still understands how formidable such a blow is.

It is a sting of concentrated power, a sting that confuses the mind and makes her sick to her stomach. It's so fast that she can't even see it, but her eyes can still keep up with it. Her body has time to react.

It's as if the world is painted white...

Like the others, Samluch admits that she is a spunky and rude person, but that in no way makes her shallow. Rather, it is her pugnacious nature that allows her to make sound decisions on the battlefield.

It is why she instinctively understands how dangerous locusts are. That even if there were a hundred times more of them, she couldn't face such an opponent.

But then why... Eventually she comes back to this question and feels the same anxiety. Because of her thoughtless and ferocious disposition, she finds it difficult to accept the incredible power that has so suddenly descended upon her.

No, is that really all it is?

- A wretched coward. I'm bored with people like you. I bet you live a gloomy life and no one wants to hang out with you.

- What did you say?! Look at you, you've got the nerve to call others gloomy!

An angry yell. The clenched fist of her aura hits Zairiched squarely in the face, but she only responds with a compassionate chuckle.

- There, there, right off the bat... Hehehe, tell me, what are you so afraid of?

- ...Aah!

- Y-You only know how to run? T-then you can't win. And you can't kill a flea. Weak, weak... I'm stronger!

Simultaneously, with a sudden cry, the scarlet spear seeks to strike its target from below. Neither the radius of impact nor the angle of impact defies common sense: the tip of the spear curves space itself. There are no safe havens in a battle with a thirsty witch.

- Aha-ha, really an innocent girl, only too good to run. Y-you're so pathetic, I'm going to shred you.

This is followed by a storm of lightning strikes. The delicate balance is maintained, and Samluch still manages to dodge them all. Undoubtedly, such an achievement can be called a true miracle, but she is not the least bit proud of it herself.

Coward... The recent word has settled in her chest, burning through her like a curse. Yes, she understands that the confusion over the mysterious amplification is just an excuse.

Samluch is cowardly, feeling terrified. Afraid to experience the "agony" of colliding with the immense power of herself again.

She has already dealt several blows to Zairiched, but none of them have had any effect. The reason, as she had pointed out, was merely her unwillingness to shorten her distance.

To inflict significant damage requires a determination to get close enough for the enemy to show physical and mental weakness. At the very least, Samluch is one of those warriors, and she does not know how to attack when she retreats.

But it goes without saying that the shorter the distance, the harder it is to evade. Which means there's a greater chance of missing the devil's lance. No, what's even more terrifying is the idea that even a hard hit won't make any difference - what if it's just a simple lack of power?

If it's all about a simple lack of firepower, she needs to get hurt on purpose.

Take that pain, the force-induced unprecedented agony, and survive by a thread, then endure it for the rest of her life. She understands that she will achieve nothing otherwise, and she has even managed to swear that she will overcome this weakness.

But now, as she is forced to face it, reason yields to instinctive terror. So she tries to take another step, to cross that decisive line...

- Damn you!!!

As if to drive away her own cowardice, Samluch lets out a furious scream and rushes forward. In the midst of a landscape reminiscent of pictures from her past, she recalls her proud declaration that she would one day be a true hero.

Quinn, who listened to her that time, is surely in an even more unenviable position now. Undoubtedly, those who are just the three of them in the king of evil's domain are far more frightened.

And if that's the case, why is she being such a snot?

She has no intention of losing, especially to Magsarion-not to him!

- D-douche, it's not a defense, it's a sieve. This fight is over.

The roaring spear goes straight to Samluch's heart. Firmly in a counterattack stance, she can no longer dodge, and if the spear reaches its target, death awaits her and nothing more.

So it must be deflected to the side, at least a little. She'll either avoid instant death, or...

- Wha-o-o-o-o-o?!

A moment, and her body flies upward faster than she can weigh the situation. When she comes to, she realizes that she is tens of meters above the ground, and then falls on her back, unable to cushion the impact.

- Gha, ah...!

- Are you in pain? Sorry. But it's better than being killed, isn't it?

Hearing a gentle voice from the side that could even be called carefree, Samluch raises her head and sees someone she didn't expect to see at all.

- ...Roxanne! What are you doing here?

- What's the matter, I'm not bad either, you know? Of course I'll do what I can when everyone's having such a hard time.

- Oh, no, that's not what I meant.

Does she know what's going on? She seems to have bailed her out somehow, but there's surprisingly little tension in the warmly smiling Roxanne.

- Well, you can leave the rest to me. I'll take care of hers.

What's more, she utters words that are also highly questionable. Even her intonation sounds as weightless as a feather, which makes it seem like a bad joke. But Roxanne actually walks forward leisurely, making sure nothing accidentally hits Samluch, and turns her gaze forward.

Needless to say, it falls on the gloomy looking up Zairiched. Roxanne fearlessly stands in front of the scarlet locust and gallantly beckons her toward her.

- Welcome, lady grasshopper. And you were not shy to do as you please.

The response is lightning-fast-Samluch rushes to the rescue before the devil's spear can pass through Roxanne, but instead sees something unimaginable.

All such lunges of the storm pass by. Roxanne finds herself under fire of such density that any dodging seems impossible, yet not a scratch is left on her, and a charming smile never leaves her face.

It's as if she's standing in the pouring rain completely dry. She stays in the safe zone with imperceptible movements that Samluch can't even discern with her heightened senses, and finds a gap in the attack that simply can't be there. What's more, she gets closer and closer to Zairiched as she continues to hold her incredible defense.

- Everything is passing...

It's like she's dancing. Also with a knack that is second to none. It is essentially as gentle an art as Sirius' swordsmanship, but Samluch senses some difference in it.

Since it is nothing more than a feeling, she cannot explain it concretely. And yet, if she had to do so, she would point to the "will" behind the technique.

Sirius' blade is austere and restrained. It is frighteningly quiet, and in that absence of any pretentiousness lies its sublimity. By nature, Samluch prefers a simpler fight, but even she has experienced a reverence for the sacred king's chastity.

But what of Roxanne's technique? She is several times superior to Sirius in pure refinement, but then why does Samluch not feel reverence for her?

Rather, she feels a certain itch inside. She cannot contain her irritation, as if she were being mocked in the guise of alluring beauty.

Since even Samluch, who was watching from the side, had that feeling, one can only guess how annoyed Zairiched is. Perhaps this is the breach Roxanne is aiming for.

The soft cloth is suddenly wrapped discreetly around Locust's head. The shawl Roxanne is wearing stretches forward and wraps around her at some point.

The silk that slipped through the breach in everyone's consciousness could no longer be described as anything other than witchy...

- ...Agh!

Zairiched, her eyes widening in surprise, jumps backward in a straight line just as her spear did. In a moment, her head would have been wrapped even more tightly, her exaggerated reaction illustrating how this thin cloth, which cannot even be called a weapon, shook the formidable Daeva.

- Oh, what a pity, and I was going to make your face a little more pleasing to the eye.

The dark-haired dancer, her lush form gleaming in the morning sun, is as graceful and beautiful as a guria weaving a celestial cloth. At the same time, however, it seems as if a mysterious and unkind glow lurks within her jewel. Of course, Samluch wasn't the only one who had questions about her behavior.

- W-who are you?

- M-my name is Roxanne!

She's mocking. She's obviously playing around. By this time, Samluch is well aware of the cause of her anxiety.

This woman, so gregarious and cheerful, is really just mocking everyone around her. Neither the Yazat nor the Daeva are any exception to her-perhaps even the world's fate of war between good and evil seems one big folly to this willful temptress. There's no telling what her goals are, but there's no question that she's dangerously close to madness.

- ... Screw you.

Samluch fails to hold back an angry whisper. This can't go on like this.

She clenches her fists, not about to let Roxanne do as she pleases. As her resolve begins to surpass her terror, the situation between the two rivals also begins to change.

- T-you're... strong.

Zairiched smiles. Trembling with small shivers, and the eyes in her sunken eye sockets light up with the fire of eerie joy.

- Strong, great, funny... And yet...

Whispering this, as if putting something together, she explodes with the scarlet power of herself in the next instant.

- I'm stronger!!!

Her whole body feels like it has turned into a spear and is coming closer and closer. Obviously, the encounter with the mighty opponent has just raised Zairiched to a new level. The inexhaustible fighting spirit inherent in locusts breeds endless development.

Therefore, even Roxanne cannot dodge with the same success. She manages to dodge the blow itself, but she makes a tiny error in trajectory and ends up too close. A powerful momentum pushes her and tosses her into the air.

- ...Gha-ah!

Like a wild beast, Zairiched growls and grabs her ankle with his teeth. She bites down on the bone, pulls toward her, and lunges upward with her spear, but the end of it still strikes only the air.

- You go on and on about strength, and you seem very proud of it...

Having cut off her own right leg, Roxanne hovers in the air behind Zairiched's head. Exactly in her blind spot-although the lost leg has already regained its former appearance.

Haoma's gift of incredible speed, allowing her to grow a limb in less than a hundredth of a second...

- ...But in the end, strength in a fight is strength that is available to men as well. Of course, we women can also be strong...

A foot glistening with all the colors of the rainbow draws an arc and hits exactly the back of the locust's head.

- ...But if we do not remain beautiful, it makes no sense.

There is a rumble and a startling destruction. Cracks spread across the ground like a spider's web, and Zairiched finds herself buried in the very center of it, but immediately breaks through the stone and rises to the surface.

- Y-yes, I can't get enough of men!

Her skull-like head is covered in blood, and the witch howls as she ruffles her own hair.



- And B-Bahlavan and Taurvid are head over heels in love with me!

An even more powerful lunge with her spear, and this time Roxanne loses her left arm. However, she covers it with a shawl, and it also grows back in the blink of an eye for a counterattack.

- Oh, really? Maybe you misunderstood them.

- Shut up, shut up, you don't know anything, you don't know anything!!!

Their argument aside, the advantage goes from one side to the other. Roxanne and Zairiched's battle has reached an incredibly high level, and now they see no one but each other.

So this is her chance. Samluch cast aside all extraneous thoughts, transforming herself into a creature just waiting for the decisive moment.

Until her prey gets closer, until her fangs can plunge into her most vulnerable spot... She's literally turned into a waiting predator, with silent breathing and spring-loaded muscles.

And the chance she's been waiting for is right in front of her...

- You're no match for me, or anyone else! I'm better than that!

As a master of direct attacks, Zairiched is invincible in a frontal confrontation, but vulnerable to lateral attacks. And given that she has absolutely no expectation of attack from the side, even such a monster is unlikely to remain unscathed.

Overcoming her fear, Samluch lunges forward, delivering an explosive blow to Zairiched's cheekbone, and she flies away, leaving only the distinct sensation of being hit. Turning into a scarlet comet, the locusts fly several hundred meters, punching through the arena wall and never coming back, buried under the rubble.

- ...So, did you get it, you bastard?!

Samluch joyfully clenches his fist. Her posture is restrained, but she puts all the emotions that drive her into it. Standing to the side, Roxanne puffs out her cheeks in a hurt look.

- There, I told you to leave her to me.

- Shut up, we'll talk to you later. There's another enemy left, and I'm worried about Fer and his royal majesty, so now we'd better...

Samluch fails to finish because of the shiver that pierces her whole body like a spear.

- ...It doesn't seem to be over yet.

Apparently, Roxanne sensed it as well. Standing side by side, both of them turn their gaze to the dilapidated arena. You can't see anything through the thick dust curtain, and yet...

- So that's how it is. That's how you decide.

A characteristic grim stammer is heard. From this distance the voice should not reach them, but the ominous whisper seems to pierce through their eardrums.

Samluch suddenly feels himself breaking into a cold sweat. At the same time, a single thought repeats in her head like a siren.

"I messed up. It didn't help, it won't happen again..."

If she was going to bet on the unexpected, the fight had to end with a single blow, no matter what. However, she was unable to finish her opponent off and can no longer escape her fate...

- ...Shut up!

Samluch shakes his head as hard as he can, banishing the strange premonition. Think straight, the odds are clearly on our side right now.

So what if she missed one chance? She already senses victory is imminent, and it's her opponent who's nervous now.

She doesn't know what to expect from her partner, and she doesn't have much confidence in her, but now Roxanne is obviously fighting for them. They've just made sure that the two of them are capable of doing some serious damage to the locusts, so it's enough to "surround" her until they're victorious.

Yes, both in terms of firepower and compatibility, the outcome is already a foregone conclusion. No matter how you look at it, Zairiched simply has no way out, but no matter how much she wants to claim it...

- T-t-tough girl. Decided to strike while I wasn't looking at you? You think that makes you stronger?

Why does she keep pouring sweat and the pounding of her heart barely beats an alarm?

Emerging from behind the veil, Zairiched is covered in wounds. She has definitely sustained serious damage, which means Samluch's hunch was correct.

However...

- All right, have it your way. You'll be sorry, you freaks!

Samluch had no idea. All of the Locusts of Ferocity have taken several Commandmentss.

- I told you. You don't mean much to me.

Taurvid's crooked blades reach their target, striking Sirius directly in the heart.

Yet even having done so, they cannot penetrate deeper. As if meeting steel beneath the skin, they fly back and cross again to repel the counterattack.

- Uh-oh!

Taurvid raises his voice, but not so much out of surprise as out of a much stronger respect. For only at this moment has Sirius changed his manner of swordsmanship.

Sprawling and impressive. Courageous, but subtle. Even with pride-worthy power, it is not at all stained with blood or carnage.

A savior's blade that gives hope to all who are weak and never falters. Truly, this is the manner of the true hero that all worthy men dream of.

- All beautiful things want to imitate... Yes, I know exactly what you mean, Daeva. I may be a pathetic fake, but that's more than enough for you.

Varhran is capable of more... As if to say so loudly, Sirius's full force punch hits Taurvid. Despite the fact that he had tried to block it a moment before, he is only spectacularly thrown backwards and ends up sprawled on the ground.

That's why the blue locust looks up into the sky and laughs out loud with an innocent laugh.

- Wonderful - amazing, I'm almost in love! Then in exchange for that, I'll keep my promise and fulfill your request.

Neither Taurvid nor Zairiched have restrained themselves until now. They are willing to swear on their honor that they fought as hard as they could, and that can be called an immutable fact.

It cannot be said, however, that they have shown all the cards on their hands. The battle is always fickle, and since they have no omnipotent technique suitable to every situation, it is only natural that they should choose their tactics according to their position. And let it be that they are the ones who always disregard such common sense... Be that as it may, they certainly put all their energies into battle, judging sensibly what is appropriate and what is not. From a similar perspective, the locusts have a very practical value system.

And so now they decide to change their style.

- H-Hazakh Ruma is what I took from Bahlavan when I met him. He b-became so cool that I wanted to keep his dream, even when I killed him... So I just repeated after him.

- That means I have another one, my own Commandment.

Zairiched leans forward, pointing his spear, while the Taurvid leaps to his feet, spreading his blades as if pointing to heaven and earth.

Several Commandments taken by one man mean several prohibitions... Needless to say, this is risky, even if it is profitable, but the main danger lies in the fact that the prohibitions can contradict each other.

In other words, if Commandment A is obeyed but interferes with Commandment B, it immediately counts as a violation of the Commandment. If one accepts them without thinking about it, it goes without saying that such a thing can happen.

Does this mean that conflicting prohibitions are nothing more than suicide?

The answer is no.

- I forcibly combine them by force myself. If I make the slightest mistake, I die, but if I do it right, the chosen manner becomes even more effective.

- B-but the manner that I didn't choose becomes much weaker. B-After all, I can't leave only the strongest of them.

This means that by performing this gimmick, they significantly reduce the effect of Hazakh Ruma. In exchange for giving up the perpetual motion machine, they can display limited but truly awesome power.

If so, what exactly is their true nature?

Of course, it's not easy to hide it. Indeed, Sirius no longer has any doubts, and Samluch has begun to guess vaguely.

Simply put, we have to reason from the contrary. Since the locusts have so far preferred inexhaustible endurance, the second Commandments has been reduced to a minimum, but it can be partially seen.

Zairiched of spears, Taurvid of curved blades.

So far, the first has attacked exclusively with straight lunges, while the second, by contrast, has attacked in an arc.

Straight and curved trajectories... In that case, if they will not only attack, but also perform any other action only on a given vector...

- Take that... Only my like-minded friends were able to see it and survive.

A rampant fang that leaves nothing living in its path. That is their truth, which they have perfected for five hundred years.

- Taurvi Astwihad.
- Zairi Astwihad.

Blue makes a circle. The scarlet color rushes from its place. The fervor and lust slashes and pierces the universe itself.

Nothing can stop them, and they do not intend to release their prey.

And so behind the locusts, rushing forward...

- ...A...

...there's nothing left but mountains of corpses.

Everything below Samluch's chest is destroyed by the devil's spear.

A perfect mortal wound. No miracle, no divine act can save her any longer.

It was this moment... that determined the demise of the yazata named Samluch.

### ***Chapter 7: Permeating Void(Parts 4-5)***



- Take out the ligature, leave the seal, fill this emptiness. Hear me, I pray, **Avesta** - let my desire find you on the wings of the oath.

This string of words is a paternoster and a demand, a promise and a salvation at the same time. An equal exchange, giving power in exchange for the demonstration of a fundamental part of nature.

In a universe divided by the duality of black and white, everyone's color is determined from birth. There is no free will in this, and precisely because there is only a merciless battle awaiting everyone, perhaps something like this is simply necessary.

The right to establish one's own rule of life that will be valid even after death. If no one could assert themselves and take pride in their differences with the rest of the world, the universe would quickly become an empty farce. In a world where everyone only fights among themselves, like puppets, there would be no richness of individual colors without the ability to define one's way of life.

This is why this safety net exists. It is necessary so that everyone's life does not descend into a meaningless spectacle, so that the universe is woven into a perfect scene.

In a real scene...

Complex but orderly, in which good and evil, love and hate, joy and sorrow intertwine.

Overflowing life and death with hope and despair, victories and defeats.

This pattern woven of human souls is imperfect and fleeting, which is why it is so sweet and beautiful.

- Truth is my desire. The fetters of my Commandment are my payment for it. If this claim is from the faithful, let the thread of my soul be woven with others under the throne.

By accepting God's punishment in the event of a violation of this word, he demonstrates to the world his resolve. He will no longer be as he was before. There is in this both a blessing that grants new life and a curse that will disgrace him forever.

The heavenly spinner turns to him. Tell me, what color pattern will you show me?

Tell me of your radiance. Enchant me with your shining values. What fleeting light will your Commandment shed on my canvas of eternal battle?

How will you warm my curiosity?

- I'm...

Feeling the deity's question inside him, Ferdows is speechless for a moment.

Not because he is confused, much less afraid.

He only wants to carve his decision. On his own soul, on the most ruthless world. He deliberately "collects" the feelings that overwhelm him in their entirety, so that they will never weaken again.

And so it is quite natural that the words that follow are devoid of the slightest shred of doubt.

- I shall be forever deprived of human warmth. No kindness, no bodily contact, no embrace. I shall see no compassion from others. No praise of any kind. Let the coldness of steel wait for me, that in a fight to the death forever thirsts for blood.

In other words, he claims to be a blade... This is nothing less than the oath the black knight swore.

Perhaps the bloodlust turned to everything around him yields in his case to the boundless rejection caused by the confession of being a worthless fool, but the bonds themselves are not one bit different.

Hell on earth, in which he is able to touch others only in the name of killing. The burning of his own life, devoid of any warmth.

- And so I offer you my praise. Give me your answer, foremother of all existence **Avesta** is the promised burden and the payment for it worthy of the heavenly will? I demand that thy inheritance be made known to me at this very hour.

The form of this address is polite and courteous, but the feeling behind it is close to the threat of a madman.

Give me strength. Do your work. Dare you cross me, and I will destroy you...



In the face of a young man turned into a knight of hate, Truth speaks with all the earnestness in the world.

She praises him. Cherishes him. How beautiful this pattern is. With love for all things, two different eyes gaze upon him from one who sits beyond human comprehension.

As if embodying this universe where there is nothing but a battle between incompatible opposites...

The hands of the one who is cursed and called the mad mother enclose Ferdows in her gentle arms.

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The Fiery Sword of the Pernicious Curve, Taurvi Astwihad... A Commandment forbidding any action, from gait to hand or eye movements, except in an arc.

Frankly, it forces a detour in everything, and though you wouldn't expect such a thing from a blue locust with his easygoing disposition, it is in the intentional observance of the rule that its value lies.

Because the effect of the Commandment increases according to how hard it is to keep, many find the shackles that do not suit them to be the best. Such a choice is very dangerous, but Taurvid is not one who cares about risk. All of his interests come down to how he can become even stronger.

A spiraling blade that forever draws an arc that could cut through creation. The damage it inflicts increases considerably, but it also becomes more narrowly focused.

By reducing all its movements to a single vector, it ceases to pay attention to its surroundings. After all, he is unable to achieve a circumferential path of his own thoughts.

This means that everyone is hit indiscriminately. Whoever gets in his way, he will shred them all into atoms. Since this makes his battle with the rest of the world far more effective, there is no problem at all—in fact, before his exile, Taurvid regarded his weak neighbors as nothing more than meat.

It's their fault for not being able to dodge. Those who die on the level ground are simply too weak. If one considers the true meaning of strength to be the pursuit of a transcendent being, such logic cannot be called faulty, but needless to say, it is incompatible with the aesthetics of Hazakh Rūma.

That he accepted this Commandment anyway shows his sincere respect for Bahlavan. He took it in order to remember forever the humiliation of losing to a system of values called "The Strongest," according to which even wretched insects deserve a fair fight one-on-one. And at the same time to leave in his own heart the greatest joy he experienced in doing so, as well as the proof that such a powerful husband once existed.

He has by no means strayed from his own path, much less vowed to serve him faithfully.

To even out the contradiction by force of self and to achieve a perfect compatibility between Bahlavan's Commandment and his own Commandment is Taurvid's present goal. This may be difficult for him now, and he cannot prevent the deformation, but one day he will achieve it.

That is when he will surpass Bahlavan in mind and body. He praises his strength and therefore becomes stronger, even stronger, and when he is no stronger, he will tear him to pieces. The mere thought of the moment when he will have his way makes Taurvid's heart race and his blood burn with the fire of excitement.

As if to bring his ardor to life, the silver-blue arc becomes a work of art unlike any other to kill. The whole horror of the Locusts of the Ferocious is precisely that they are serious about making a childlike babbling absurdity come true. There may be no absolute power in the world, but without willpower to match Taurvid's, it is impossible to defend against his diabolical technique.

At the very least, faced with it, Sirius cannot think otherwise.

Yes, in the end this only applies to Sirius.

- W-well...!

- ...What?

An astonished cry resounded simultaneously from the attacking and the defending side. Which means that a third party has just entered the fray.

- What is it... The interference of a small fry has spoiled the mood?

It was none other than Ferdows - a moment before Taurvid's blade reached Sirius, he appeared right in his path. The manner was so clumsy that it could not be called either a defense or a counter-attack - he literally threw himself under attack. In an instant, the young man's frail, diminutive body was transformed into a bloody sack of meat and bones.

In spite of this, however, the blue spiral stopped. From the outside it looks as ridiculous as if an ant had stopped a comet, but of course there are several reasons.

Taurvid may have avoided breaking the conflicting Commandment through sheer force, but he couldn't eliminate the contradiction fundamentally. As a result, the Fiery Blade, indecipherable in its essence, has lost some of its power.

A virtue in the form of maximum effectiveness when both sides are aware of each other's presence, and a disadvantage in the form of loss of original potential when an outsider intervenes in the fight.

In other words, in this case, his danger against anyone other than Sirius is not so great. He's still capable of cleaving heaven and earth with a single blow, but there's no doubt that he couldn't hit the suddenly interfering fighter with all his might.

Besides, Ferdows is not the same Ferdows now as he was before. For some reason his regeneration has accelerated dramatically, and more importantly...

- A strong bloodlust, yes-you fit right in.

He also took the second commandment and thus gained new life. Like a bloody blade that knows no other touch but to kill, and thus can grow sharper and sharper, without end.

His current opponent is the Locust of Ferdows... Against the mad desire to destroy all life in the universe, Ferdows' sharpness also goes beyond reason.

It was all inevitable.

Ignoring the pain of his shattered limbs, Ferdows, regenerating through the fractures, raises his leg sharply. The impact crushes Taurvid's chest beyond the sound barrier, and the shockwave launches the blue locust into the stratosphere.

What's more, it doesn't end there.

- Saam, Saam, Saam, Saam, Saam... Shebatir, Alastor.

Without delay, the gifts of the starry spirit layered on top of each other. A forbidden technique, destructive to enemies and wearers, offering extraordinary power only to those who forsake the morrow. Ferdows, wrapped in a comet of exorcism, rushes after Taurvid with almost frantic determination. He no longer even looks at Sirius behind him.

He will kill the enemy. He will kill him, no matter what. No matter what happens to him, he can't stand the way the scum keep breathing. Every minute, every second - every moment, as long as there are still Daevas in the world, by his connivance he only tarnishes Marika's glorious name.

How can he put up with this?

- Ha-ha-ha, you're not bad - say your name!

- To your ears I have no name!

Taurvid laughingly blocks a lunge that could pierce the planet, but still can't get the momentum down to zero and flies back. Ferdows, who rushes after him, also draws his sword from its sheath and sparks fly through the air at supernatural speed. Both of them are already hundreds of kilometers away from the capital and keep dashing forward. They keep colliding with each other.

At this rate, a full circle around the planet is unlikely to take them more than a few minutes.

- Interesting choice of prohibition, though. Reminds me of us.

Even in a supernatural battle in a freezing vacuum, Taurvid doesn't think to stop talking. Perhaps it's the experience of many a ristalion that defies common sense, but he's already guessing at the essence of the Commandment of Ferdows.

- I always thought you preferred to rely on numbers. For example, that same Sirius, for all his fiddling, clearly embodies "universal strength." And you're not like that at all!

Taurvid keeps dodging the spiral and doesn't hold back an exclamation. At first glance he may seem to be mocking, but his behavior is not only fast, but also unpredictable. Simply put, it is unholy, and traditional swordsmanship-trained Ferdows has difficulty coping with it.

Perhaps if he had honed it to Sirius' level the conversation would have been different, but he can't do it here and now. In the end, strengthening Ferdows only enhances his physical strength and gives him explosive potential: it has no effect on the skill itself.

- Well, he's obviously hiding something else, too, but I'll try to find out more after I defeat you. The idea of turning my bloodlust against me is a pretty good one, and I can guess what it cost you, but...

At this, Taurvid turns to attack for the first time. A blade of fervor, dissecting the universe.

- You are inexperienced, child.

Now that the two opponents can see each other, the blue spiral is strikingly different from the one blocked from the outside. Once again Ferdows cannot even make out the sweep of his blades and crumbles to bloody shreds. Before the unthinkable cruelty of a Daeva of special rank, any one awaits only a sad demise...

If he falls, it will end like their first fight. This time, however, his readiness is quite different.

- Indeed, I am weak...

Whispering with self-disdain, Ferdows knew that this would be the end of it. He accepted the prohibition against any physical contact other than killing not at all out of blind imitation of Magsarion. He has his own regrets. His own anger.

- I realize, too, that his majesty is quite right. Fighting evil together is the essence of the Ashavan...

Ferdows, chopped into little pieces, still does not fall, continuing to hang in the air. Besides, albeit slowly, he is going back.

Despite the fact that Taurvid has forcefully commanded him to "Die," his will is now enough to resist even that.

Like a parasite giving its host abnormal strength in exchange for decay from within, desperate hatred turns to his own inferiority.

Compared to Sirius, who uses his subjects as fuel, he does not consider himself even remotely superior or more worthy. At least, his majesty is strong enough that the deaths of those he kills are not wasted. He is much closer to "hope" than Ferdows, who can only chase a naive dream and does not even have the power to achieve it.

That is why he is so pathetic and unforgivable. For his weakness, which will only lead to more shame in his future life.

For his foolishness, for his inability to give up his dream of becoming everyone's hero, even when all that awaits him is failure.

It is so unbearable that he no longer desires salvation.

He knows that the real rabble that he wants to kill more than anyone else is none other than himself.

- Because I don't know my place, everyone around me dies. The eulogies, the sympathy... I realized that someone like me shouldn't dream of such a thing.

At the sight of the young man talking to himself as if he were delirious, Taurvid does not resume his attack, but only observes. Not because he gives him a chance-he is bewildered from the bottom of his heart, feeling threatened in his own way.

At first he mistook this Commandment for a vow to live only to kill, which turns bloodlust into strength. That's why he said he saw a resemblance to his own kind, but apparently they are different in some ways. His intuition whispers to him that until he understands this contradiction, it could turn out to be a fatal mistake.

What should he do then? Focus on uncovering the truth? Or disregard it and lash out?

Common sense says the first option is more appropriate. Taurvid believes that he must first solve the riddle, including an apology for misunderstanding Ferdows' nature.

At the same time, however, he cannot shake off the desire to rush headlong into unknown danger. He wants the unimaginable power of the new enemy to leave no trace of his sanity. He wants to win in spite of this and tear the enemy to shreds.

He chooses, he chooses - ah, what to do? What does he want? What power art thou?!

- So unfair, tell me soon, tell me soon!

Drunk with bliss, Taurvid drools, torn between two desires. But one such as he is incapable of understanding the answer in any case.

There is no one in the world who is as far removed from the sadness and suffering of the weak as the locusts. That is why this power is not so much like him as it is his exact opposite.

- Ah-ah-ah-ah, that's it, I can't wait any longer!

The balance is broken, and Taurvid rushes forward exactly as Ferdows strikes.

- The unattainable ideal of the Savior, Saoshyant Aushedar.

The bloodlust is nothing more than a detonator. Indeed, the stronger it is, the stronger the explosion, but the fuel feeling that serves lies elsewhere.

The universal hero, the living legend that would become the hope of the forces of good... Realizing how great the difference between his ideal and reality is, Ferdows makes his weapon a growing hatred of himself. He transforms himself into something that can only bring destruction to his enemies, unworthy of the kindness of those around him.

Indeed, Ferdows is now a blade that becomes stronger the more unsightly it is broken. Because of weakness, because of love, because of a dream he cannot give up even in the harshest of circumstances...

He who runs toward the light through a series of countless obstacles, knowing that he will reach it only in convulsions.

The pitiful, the foolish, the ridiculous - it is the sword, shattered into small pieces, that can become the devastating steel that will leave its ghastly mark on the world.

- Guo-o-o-o-o-o!!!

Therefore, his statement that locusts are the best fit was quite appropriate. A reality which without any shyness or mercy hammered into him an awareness of the difference in their abilities. Its own potential, comparable to a small stone on the side of the road.

The greater the difference between the two sides, the greater the regrets that awaken the young warrior.

Near-perfect conditions that make him a big game hunter. At least while Ferdows is ashamed and disappointed in his own worthlessness, his proportionately growing fighting power literally knows no bounds.

Indeed, Taurvid's armor is shattered, and he retreats in a spray of blood. This is the kind of damage he has never suffered since he lost to Bahlavan.

And yet it is evident that under such circumstances he will not fail for anything-and the newly assembled blue locust flies at Ferdows as if nothing had happened.

- What?! What kind of power was that?! Now that's what I mean, it would have been boring without that!

At the sound of a thunderous battle call, the spiraling blade bleeds Ferdows, causing new scarlet flowers to blossom. Thanks to his regeneration, he can continue to fight, but he is still unable to withstand Taurvid's attacks. Rather, their danger only grows more dangerous each time, which means it inevitably leads to another reinforcement, and this indescribable game of tug-of-war has no end in sight.

Despite the fact that Taurvid's perpetual motion machine must be much weaker than usual at the moment, it shows no weariness at all. Perhaps it is his sheer strength or his inherent unimaginable stamina-either way, Ferdows understands that he is better off not trying to beat his foe to a pulp. Expecting the enemy to suddenly weaken, the Locust of Ferocity cannot be defeated.

At the same time, however, he feels that he must maintain this balance of power. At least for a while, until he waits for the necessary conditions...

- Ooh-ha-ha, what are you getting at? Okay, that's interesting, it gives me goosebumps, show me! You can't wait for someone to come to your rescue!

- Stop... talking so much...!

He couldn't help himself and reacted to the unpleasant noise, but Taurvid's remark struck a chord. The current Ferdows is not sentimental enough to rely on his friends for help. He does not consider himself worthy of such.

That is why this plan is for him alone. More specifically, he is waiting for enough time to pass.



"198, 197, 196, 195..."

While the fight to the death is going on, with no time to even blink, he keeps counting down in his head. There's just over three minutes to zero.

He can't be sure he's counting accurately, though. The last time he checked the time was more than five minutes ago, and he can't check again now.

For one thing, he doesn't have time for it, and even if he did, it would be immediately apparent. He's already seen how sharp Taurvid's instincts are, and if he wants to get something done, he needs to go around him. Even if he manages to buy time, I doubt anything will come of it if his opponent expects it.

"189, 188, 187, 186!.."

The mere seconds dragged on like an eternity. He didn't want to count faster because of impatience, but he's better off assuming he's "in a hurry" anyway. Ferdows partially concentrates his consciousness on his trusty pocket watch and trusts his fate to it.

Very soon a new day will come. It is still early morning here in the holy kingdom, but in Ferdows' homeland it is about to hit midnight.

Monday will give way to Tuesday. He is unlikely to be able to continue taking Taurvid's blows if he loses his ability to regenerate. However, a different gift will replace it.

"Wait at my place, you're going to dance yet. I will definitely put an end to this...!"

In anticipation of the impending turning point, Ferdows continues to fight like a lion. He is sure that if he does not make a mistake in time, he will surely win.

After all, Tuesday is a "lucky" day when in a one-on-one battle he has no equal.

## 5

The scarlet thirst that burst forth was truly invincible. It has created the destruction that Zairiched had hoped for, but it has also created a bizarre spectacle that even she herself cannot control.

- Ouch, ouch, moment, stop - stop, stop, ah-ah-ah-ah!

Beautifully she only managed to run a few hundred yards. After that, she stumbled awkwardly and screeched across the ground like a pebble on a watery surface. The difference was so unsightly that it was nothing short of a bad comedy.

But Zairiched is by no means playing the buffoon. Simply put, she is not much different from Taurvid.

The forbidden technique of combining the Commandments. She is capable of a formidable lunge at an enemy she knows, but against others its effect becomes much weaker. In the case of Zairiched, this is particularly noticeable: outside interference can literally knock the ground out from under her feet.

It is likely that her respect and affection for Bahlavan is stronger than that of Taurvid. Her power against outsiders not only falls, she cannot touch them at all, and every time she must go on a curve, she bounces in the air and rolls on, as if stumbling. It may look like a parody of a steeplechase, but she doesn't move a millimeter from her main straight path.

As a result, Zairiched inevitably flies in a straight line, far over the horizon. When will she stop? Will she come back? No one knows, but there is one thing that is certain.

The Spear of Scarlet Thirst never misses its target. Which means its chosen prey will surely be killed.

- ...Kha!

On a straight as an arrow trail of destruction, Roxanne sits coughing up blood. Her eternal smile still lingers on her lips, but she still looks much paler, with numerous drops of sweat protruding from her face and dripping down her chin.

She has lost the entire right side of her body. No matter how many of Haoma's gifts she uses, she fails to regenerate-she can't even stop the bleeding. The power of Zairiched, left in her wounds, is like poison, stopping any attempt to heal them.

It also causes unbearable pain, capable of destroying the very soul. Even Roxanne, whose true potential is unknown to anyone, can now do little more than preserve her sanity.

- That's unfortunate. That's a little... I could die that way. But with my restraints...

While she is whispering to herself, her left hand is suddenly grabbed by another hand.

- Agh! Roxanne!

Samluch's voice reaches her from below, interrupted intermittently by a bloody cough.

- What's... the matter with me? Suddenly, it doesn't hurt...

- ...

After a moment's hesitation in answering, Roxanne tells the truth as frankly as possible.

- You're dying. There's nothing more we can do for you.

The fact that she stopped feeling pain is the best proof of that. Now that Samluch has lost everything below her chest, she already has two feet in the grave. No matter how hard she fights, her life can no longer be saved, and the sense of pain that is supposed to help her avoid death just can't work properly.

Hearing the brutal truth being communicated to her as if discussing the weather, Samluch laughs in surprise.

- So... Don't you think you don't look too good either?

- Unlike you, I didn't take the masochist commandment, so I'll get over it. But you can't heal anything in this position.

- ...Is this about her?

- Yes. If that skank isn't killed or at least chased off this planet, I'm in danger, too.

But they don't have the power to fight back. Which means, it's safe to say, they have no choice.

- So I'm sorry, but I have to leave you. Of course, if I get the chance, I'll definitely avenge you, don't worry.

She sticks her tongue out and speaks in a mischievous tone, but it sounds strange. Far enough to weaken the effects of Zairiched's power and successfully heal everything, only another planet can escape. However, the teleportation necessary for this is impossible without Sirius' permission.

The mere fact that she leaves her comrade to his fate and flees, worrying only about her own well-being, contradicts the Ashavan way of thinking. Especially considering that this decision obviously doesn't torment her, rather, it goes without saying for her.

There is clearly something wrong with Roxanne, and willfulness alone cannot explain it. But Samluch doesn't say a word about it.

As it is, she has always been the kind of person who doesn't worry about nothing. How to behave in this situation, and will she be able to overcome it? That is all that matters now, and she only clenches her fists with all her might.

Like a candle about to go out, Samluch's eyes still burn with fire.

- Give me your pain. With your skills, twisting a nervous system or something like that would probably be easy... Let this wreck think he's not dead yet.

- What? Wait, wait a minute. Why would I...

- Shut up. You're on our side now. I'm not going to die at such an important time.

If she's going to die, she might as well do it after she's won. Samluch's fierce ambition, peeking out from behind the flames of her fading life, makes Roxanne stunned. Taking advantage of this weakness, Samluch continues, not intending to miss her chance.

- I'll show you something interesting.

- ...

That brave smile, devoid of any bravado, strikes Roxanne right in the heart. She is well aware that this is an attempt to appeal to her remnants of pity and even to make a sly bet on her - and yet she changes her plans.

Indeed, Roxanne rarely decides to act for others. All she cares about is how exactly she will amuse herself. What kind of scene she can build.

She enjoys dancing on it to the best of her ability. So does watching others dance.

Her inner urges don't work in any other direction, and that's why Samluch shocks her so much. This pure determination to live and die without any double bottom seems beautiful to her.

- How beautiful you are... I even envy you.

Softly whispering this, she kisses Samluch's bloodied cheek. This kind of behavior between the two women disgusts her, but even this reaction seems charming to Roxanne.

- Don't worry, I'll see it through to the end. The way you die.

Please show me how beautiful your death is. Sing your contrived radiance as the gem that complements your beauty...

- Ah, kha! Woo... Ghaa-ah-ah-ah!!!

After getting what she asked for, Samluch, of whom only her torso remains, leaps into the air. Her newly ready to stall heart beats with renewed vigor and, along with the powerful blood rush, generates the kind of pressure that warps space itself.

Then an explosion-like scream bursts from Samluch's throat. Pain, pain-all the wounds she has received so far are nothing compared to the mortal wound, reinforced by the power of the Locust of Ferocity itself.

She had long since crossed the threshold of tolerance that is inherent in humans. Going mad with agony, Samluch turns gray in an instant, her clenched teeth crumble into tiny pieces, and her fingernails fall off and fall off.

Covered in burst blood vessels, her face now looks more like a broken pomegranate... But despite this, the flame in her eyes doesn't go out, it burns brighter and brighter.

Perhaps, responding to this heat, a miracle occurs. The body of the warrior, whose death had just been inevitable, begins to breathe again.

It is the last fuel, a one-way ticket without which she will have nothing left. But its unimaginable mass and density make the scarlet aura soar to the heavens. Along with a battle cry, Samluch rises to his feet.

The whole thing swoops over Roxanne's head as she squints her eyes mesmerized.

It's like an innocent girl trying her makeup for the first time and admiring herself in the mirror, forgetting to count the time. Or maybe like a seductress admiring her beautiful skin while bathing in a bath of blood.

Whatever it is, in essence they are hardly different.

- What's th-that?

Finally back in the capital, Zairiched also notices the towering column of aura. The unforeseen sight makes her involuntarily ask a rhetorical question, but in general terms she understands, of course.

- S-so this ugly girl survived?

She doesn't like it. I mean, she's genuinely proud of the fact that her spear is the ultimate death gimmick. A lethal hold is supposed to kill in one blow, which means if the enemy survives it, they're no good. How so - if her calling card turns out to be a lie, she will be even further removed from the throne of the strongest!

- N-no pains to watch. Even the strength of myself has weakened. N-no pardon for you, no one has ever humiliated me like that.

And anyway, even more irritating to her is the fact that this aura is red. Scarlet, crimson, scarlet... It's her pride, isn't it?

- T-then we are too much alike. D-don't think that imitating me will make men like you, ugly. You miserable fake, I'll kill you. I'll kill you!

Which means I'll have to do it again. The shameless imitation doesn't even deserve to see it.

This time it will be fatal... The invincible spear, into which she will put all her soul, will leave no trace of her. So Zairiched decides, blazing with rage, and stands in a heavily tilted forward stance. In order to wrap her mind around the fact that she has been wounded, she says her prayer once more.

- Zairi Astwihad.

At the same time, the power of the locusts themselves rises to the sky, vowing to flee until they reach their target.

The scarlet thirst transforms into thrust, and Zairiched, who has become the devil's all-piercing spear, rushes forward. She is faster than light itself now, and the blast of her kinetic energy could split even a star.

...A moment.

An equally scarlet projectile of light flies toward Zairiched. As fast and powerful as it is, an almost equal force collides head-on with it.

Under normal circumstances, this unimaginable catastrophe would have reduced an entire star system to rubble with a single shockwave-but the fact that nothing but the target was harmed is perhaps to be attributed to an inherent property of the techniques.

Needless to say, Zairiched has her Commandments, but on the other hand it is explained by "universal power." The true nature of Samluch's enigmatic enhancement remains shrouded in mystery, but there is no doubt that it lies in the purpose of the ashawans. The miracle bestowed upon her by ■■■■■■■■■■■■ ■■■■■■ exists to protect all good prayers.

Therefore, the fact that no unnecessary destruction followed can be called the truth of life and even the rule of heaven itself. However, here and now, no one is interested in such reasoning.

- I'll kill you, I'll kill you... I'm definitely stronger!

- Screw you - I'll send you away, no matter what!

For both players in this battle, there is nothing but the result, which will be clear in a moment. Both of them are not sparing their strength, and they both claim victory at the top of their voices.

And it's not just the two of them who are demonstrating the limit of their abilities right now.

"Zero...!"

Ferdows' countdown has finally come to an end. This means that he can no longer rely on regeneration, and his consciousness shifts slightly toward defense. The ensuing slack is almost invisible, but, of course, Taurvid is not the kind of man who would miss it.

- I tell you, you don't have enough experience. It's written all over your face.

He chuckles, and a spiral of flame slices Ferdows neck. What's more, on the way back the curved blade cuts his torso into small pieces, and Taurvid grabs the remaining head by the hair as if it were a trophy.

- Fight to the death is such a thing, where one moment can mean the difference between life and death. So why are you making plans ahead of time?

These regret-filled words are appropriate and fit the locusts perfectly. According to the basics of battle, one can never be sure what will happen in the next second exists only "now". It is in the willingness to devote one's whole self to that dazzling moment that lies the power worthy of finding the future.

- It was great at first, and then you flattened out and deflated. I wish I'd met you in twenty years...

Taurvid shrugs, sighs, and is about to throw his head away, when suddenly...

- I think you met me just in time...

Ferdows, of whom only his head remains, opens his mouth. Moreover, his chest, shoulders, arms... are slowly but slowly recovering.



- I myself know what I'm missing-so good it makes me want to cry... Yes, let me repeat what I said. You fit the bill perfectly.

There's nothing strange about this rebirth-it's just that Tuesday still hasn't come. Ferdows thought he was in quite a hurry, so he counted slowly, but in the end he still had more than ten seconds left.

This shows how much of a hurry he was in. His mediocrity, his own worthlessness once again sinking its fangs into him, and he has nothing to counteract Taurvid's reproaches...

A sense of frustration that builds without end. A Commandment that gives strength in exchange for curses to his own address lifts Ferdows to new heights. Grown hands grip Taurvid tightly, and his bloodied face, despite his graceful features, smiles an eerie smile.

- You don't mean to say you're going to run, do you? Let's see who wins, Locusts of Ferocity.

Taurvid feels an imposing force begin to gather in the young man's frail body. An internal pressure building despite the fragility of his vessel-its meaning is obvious, and precisely because he feels a chill running down his back, he can't back down.

As long as he claims the throne of the strongest, there can only be one answer to any challenge.

- Funny, I'm in!

Taurvid howls as his heart sings with anticipation. His assumption that the enemy's trump card boils down to self-destruction is essentially not far from the truth.

Unlike the Locust Commandments, the Commandments of Ferdows do not contradict each other. Rather, they work on each other - and so the risk from them only increases.

The seven powers, alternating each day, represent the ideals of justice to which Ferdows aspires. In other words, they could be called images of the heroes he considers role models he wants to become.

Now, however, Ferdows realizes that he will never achieve them, and the fact that he is maddeningly ashamed of this, but continues to admire them, makes his prayer even more invincible.

It is hard to argue that it is inherent in man to appreciate more what is farther away from him. Believing in a dream that one day will surely come true does not seem as brilliant as a wish that cannot be fulfilled but cannot be denied anyway.

The "universal hero" that Ferdows will never become, and even bode for his doom... Of course, reaching out to his unique nature can only expect to turn to ash, as if he flew too close to the sun.

Especially today, Tuesday, the day of fire...

- Do you believe in God? Believe it or not, there must be one or two people in your memory who have made an impression on you.

His words are nothing more than common sense. On any planet, in any culture, intelligent life forms, in their concerns, sooner or later lean toward religious beliefs.

After which they reflect them in their calendars. A prayer for a peaceful everyday life in the name of the phenomena and personalities that have been elevated to the status of gods in the course of history. It is highly likely that one particular patron can be identified in each culture.

The god of war, the hero, the legend of the victor... To the chanting of the great god of battles is what Tuesday is all about; it is in him that his power rests.

- The Flaming Red Light is the Face of the God of War.... Novruz Veretragna!

An extraordinary amplification in attack, leaving any reasonable limits far behind. The true will of the god of war bursts out of Ferdows in the form of energy, transforming him into a huge ball of fire. Even a daeva of special rank would hardly easily endure a direct hit.

- O-o-o-o-o-o!!!

In an instant, Taurvid's entire body catches fire and turns to ash. However, the infamous locust flame, of course, cannot fall so easily.

The spiraling curved blades fold in a cross and begin to spiral, dissecting the will of the god of war. As if undermining a relentlessly pounding wave of ultra-high temperatures, it slowly creeps closer to Ferdows, who is at the epicenter.

- Ha-ha, ha-ha, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!!! What fun, what happiness, it's been a long time since I've been on fire like this!!!

Taurvid laughs out loud as he continues his spiral offensive. Ferdows, on the other hand, is already nearly unconscious, and if this struggle lasts any longer, there is a good chance that he will burn out first.

The disturbed Taurvid, however, does not agree to such an ending. He, too, is on the very edge, and he won't even think about going on the defensive and waiting it out.

- Not yet, it's too soon for you to die! Your head belongs to me!

In a tense confrontation that could even turn deadly, Zairiched goes all in.

- Hee, hee, hee, hee... I'm going to kill you. I will. Don't you dare die without permission, you impostor freak!

The two red-hot fronts oscillate back and forth equally, and the course of events is still chaotic and unpredictable. But it is clear to all that one side of the scale of life is beginning to tip over.

Fighting the Locusts like lions, the yazatas will die here. Even if they were victorious, they would only burn to the ground, to say nothing of defeat. Mortally wounded from the start, Samluch has no future in any case, and Feru will have to endure the effects of several Commandments.

So perhaps we should pray for them to at least fulfill their last will.

That leaves one who sees no other choice, and yet does not agree to put up with it.

- What would you do, Varhran... No, silly question. Of course I understand.

A shadow of reproach flickers across his stern face, and Sirius whispers heavily to himself. The leader of the good, the only one still able to move in the entire holy kingdom, is fully aware of the developments, having merged with the planet.

He has seen enough to decide what to do.

- Alas, this is the most I can do. Forgive me, I will by no means let it go to waste.

The king's sword plunges into the ground again. Just like the time he put all his subjects to sleep in an instant, then began to absorb their lives... This time, however, it has a completely different effect.

It is as if the whole planet is trembling. Slightly, but perceptibly, and the murmur only grows, not limited to the laws of physics alone. Despite the fact that the shaking is obvious, there is no wind howling, no rumbling of the ground - rather, it is as if there is a calm everywhere.

The wave called "stillness" is shapeless, soundless, and colorless, as if its shaft is just around the corner. It is so neat and omnipresent that even if the population remained conscious, it is unlikely that anyone would notice what arose before them.

- The White Wings of Good Intentions, Wohu Mana...

Silver wings that veiled the skies, capable of spanning continents. The sacred bird that embodied the holy kingdom, staggeringly defeated in the battle with the Destruction Workshop and dormant for twenty years, has been reborn in all its dignity.

...No, is that really how it is?

If Wohu Mana's wounds have already healed, it's strange that he didn't intervene sooner. Consequently, Sirius awakened him forcibly, but in that case their relationship is turned upside down.

Sirius is nothing more than a representative, and whatever heavy Commandment he takes, the most he should be able to do is to borrow a small part of the power of the star-spirit. That he treats the star-spirit itself as if it were a tame animal clearly defies any logical explanation.

At the very least, there must be no loophole that would allow such a thing...

If there's anything to call it, it's an unprecedented attack on the rules. Is it the deed of Nahid, and has he earned the love of the star-spirit with his inimitable talents by taking him into his service?

Or is it Kaikhosru's act, and he killed the star-spirit, usurped his throne, and now rules as an undisputed hegemon?

In the second case, it is possible that the very fact of Wohu Mana's hibernation all along was a lie. But if Sirius concealed the truth by tarnishing himself in the same way as the sixth king of evil...

- ...Away.

...What is the meaning of the last twenty years of torment? Where have the souls of the fallen Yazatas gone, what is the blood shed by those who fight to this day?

The answer is unknown, but the result is now abundantly clear.

The stellar wind, raised by the flapping of silver wings, has no effect on the ashavans of the planet, sending only foreign bodies flying. These, of course, are the two specially ranked Daevas, absorbed in mortal combat and expecting no outside interference.

- Wha-o-o-o-o-o?!

- Wh-o-o-o-o?!

If they had been in better shape, they would not have allowed themselves to be dealt with. But now the locusts are wounded and exhausted, their eternal engines disabled.

The wind of the starbird inevitably sends them flying far beyond the clouds. They are thrown out of the planet's atmosphere, into space, even farther...

Forcible teleportation to a super long distance. The Star Spirit, who has always possessed the keen eye of an eagle and the unparalleled mobility of a feathered creature, has used his power to drive the outsiders away with all his might. In an instant, Zairiched and Taurvid find themselves unimaginably far away, in an entirely different galaxy. Of course, it's naive to expect this to kill them, they've only been kicked out, but it's unlikely they'll be able to return easily.

Which means the immediate danger has passed. Convinced of this, Sirius draws his sword from the ground, and the asleep subjects one by one begin to awaken. They have suffered great losses and their enemy has not been defeated, but the encounter with the locusts has never ended. So it can be called a victory of patience, albeit a stretch.

- Too much effort for such ridiculousness. What is this, a test? Or fate?

Despite this, the holy king muttering to himself, ignoring the confusion of his subjects around him, still shows not a hint of a smile.

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- Damn it, damn it, damn it now, that's enough of that, it's not fair!
- Quite good, Sirius. Wait at my place, I'll be right back!

The locusts, banished from the holy kingdom, almost trample the non-existent earth in indignation. This is the second time they have been cast out in this way, and since their memories of that time still haunt them, they cannot bear to see the same fate again. They go on and on, crying and complaining about their fate, not even aware that they are in the darkness of interstellar space.

- I-I did everything right. It's probably because you're so weak, Taurvid.
- What did you say?! I'm the strong one and you're the weak one, Zairiched.
- What's that, dummy?!
- You want a fight, dummy?!

They always got along like cats and dogs. With or without the Commandment, their meeting could end in nothing but a fight to the death.

But this time, a moment before they are about to clash, the two suddenly stop. It's not because they're unwell, much less because they've suddenly gained wisdom.

It's because something completely unforeseen has occurred next to them.

- What's that?
- What is that...?

Their astonished voices echo in the darkness of space. Here, where there should be absolutely nothing but them, hangs something foreign and unimaginable.

A huge, inconceivably huge ship... Perhaps that is how you can describe it? All that is clear is that it is not a heavenly body, and to all appearances, it was created by human hands.

But exactly how it was created is impossible to understand. It gives the impression of a sword, or perhaps a bird... Because of its streamlined shape, it primarily resembles a ship, but it is too different from anything known to anyone else. To the extent that the locusts, who have destroyed many planets and civilizations in their lifetime, are incapable of describing it in any concrete way...

That's why they have only one answer in mind. They see it for the first time, but they have already heard of it. For since they are going to be the strongest, sooner or later they must defeat this opponent.

- **Angra Mainyu!!!**

- **Angra Mainyu!!!**

The space-faring womb of black and white is the fortress of Nadare, the oldest of the evil kings, rumored to be the origin of all Drujvant.

- How sad...

The occasional female voice from within makes the locusts' hair stand on end. It is not aggressive, it is not even clear whether she has noticed them, but the creepiness it exudes makes me dizzy. The words themselves are perfectly understandable, but it is impossible to discern their meaning at all.

- How sad, where is the salvation I long for? This time it will be real... Yes, I believe it.

The words of compassion and sympathy sound like a song from another dimension. Though she does indeed desire "salvation," the **Avesta** says that on a conceptual level she belongs to a different fiefdom.

This is why both Zairiched and Taurvid understand everything at the same time. Is it Nadare? Of course it is.

- I pray only that all may be happy.

Before the proclamations of one who is comparable to Bahlavan and Khvarenah, if not surpassing them, both of them are terrified for the first time in their lives.

## Chapter 8: Disappearing into the Sky(part 1-3)



*Translated by @jasper.fx*

1

The first feeling I experienced was loneliness. Sadness bordering on horror, confusion as to why I was all alone.

- Look, the little things have come together after all. As a reward for this, I, Taurvid, will mow you all down.

- I-I didn't think you'd treat me and this fool the same. As a reward for this, I, Zairiched, will stab you all until no one is left.

For as long as I can remember, I have been a battleground. On a planet that couldn't move or even speak, someone was always at war with others. Killing and dying, giving birth to replacements, and then the carnage repeating itself again. Why is this mindless mob swarming like ants, breeding like maggots, but not seeing me? Why does no one even think about my existence?

While the endless rain of their blood showered me, I could only sigh bitterly at being cut off from my surroundings. Ah, if I had legs, if I had arms, if I had a mouth, if I had wings... Surely this loneliness would not have tormented me so much.



The vector of my own fulfillment was deeply secondary to me. I only wanted those who stomped on me, who pecked at me, who defiled and ignored me, to know that I was here. I didn't care if I did it through a massacre like theirs or through the exact opposite of their mercy.

Both punches and hugs required hands. Both curses and forgiveness require the ability to utter words. Yet I was deprived of even such basic rights.

How lonely I felt. I was so frustrated by the coldness of loneliness that I almost went crazy. In fact, what frightened me was that I doubted even where I was.

Since no one recognized me, I could not deny with certainty that everything around me was not just a dream or a mirage. To declare that I was thinking, and therefore existing, first of all required an unquestioning ego. And the ego, in turn, is formed in relationships with others.

As a result, I could not even become myself, only hovering like a petal in the wind. As something vague and intangible, unable even to know if it existed or not... I suppose if I had disappeared at some point, life would have gone on without any change. There wouldn't be a single living soul in the whole world that had any feelings for me, that could prove my existence.

Powerless, meaningless. And therefore useless. I could not accept that the more I pondered, the more I thought of myself in this way. I want to become like others whose existence is clearly felt by those around me. To have a relationship in which we could call each other by name, acknowledge each other.

That's all I've longed for, earnestly. I realize that, at some point, this desire became the foundation of my blurry life, which cannot even be called loneliness.

That is why I believe that the blessing bestowed upon me simply could not have been an act of chance. Even now I am genuinely proud of it as an inevitability that I brought on through my prayers-a trophy that I had wrested from the world. A miracle that could not fail to happen is no different from heavenly providence, and so I have no reason to doubt it.

- I can't stand the sight of you. Why don't we decide who's better, who's right, black and white?

Zurvan... Oh, Zurvan. You're the reason I became myself. The feelings directed at me were reduced to hostility and hatred, but that little thing is irrelevant.

In all the universe, you looked at me more than anyone else. And therefore, in all the universe, I hated you more than anyone else.

Because you were born out of my desire, in terms of age, you were my little brother. However, since it was in the embrace of your love that I found myself, perhaps I can also be called a little sister.

Even this empty argument brought me so much joy that my heart almost jumped out of my chest.

- Today I will send you to your death, Mashyana.

Yes, my name is Mashyana. Your older and younger sister, your enemy and your woman.

The flower of love and hatred that found itself thanks to you.

If it were up to me, this beautiful struggle would have lasted forever, but I could not ignore your desire to put an end to it. And so I put all my soul into it, responded to you by declaring a war that is and never will be equal. The question of victory and defeat seemed so vulgar that I didn't even think about it-tell you the truth, I don't care now.

Both victory and defeat would herald my end. When I was born with you, I knew that I was destined to die with you. Rather, I believed that this was how our relationship would reach perfection-and I looked only at you, wished only for you.

I dreamed of the moment when, at the end of the holy war that I had sworn to make my last, you and I would be one again.

So why did you turn your back on me that time?

- You make me sick. Die.

You didn't share the pain and joy of that demise with me, but you betrayed me, leaving me all alone.

Unthinkable treason. Unforgivable treachery. I could never have imagined that in your last moments you would change your mind, and so I was shaken to my core.

Zurvan was cursing me at the words, but his thoughts were elsewhere. This was so hard to believe that I cannot accept it to this day.

Whatever feelings left your lips, as long as they were really only addressed to me, I was ready to accept with open arms any scolding. And yet...

Zurvan did not look at me.

As if I did not exist at all!

- It's all your fault, Zurvan. It's all your fault.

Because of you, I was ruined. Deprived of the chance to die with you, turned into an unsightly living dead.

Yes, I should have died, and yet I survived. Even now my body is tainted by the decaying foulness while I suffer the overripe pain of betrayal.

And this is why I want once more, no - this time to put an end to this story we made up together.

This is what is, for me, the best providence.

The form of that happiness that I so earnestly pray for, that I desire.

2

The morning sun shining through my eyelids wakes me from my sleep. At the same time, I realize that I'm crying, and I'm overcome by mild surprise.

- This... dream...

There can be no doubt-it was definitely Mashyana's consciousness. I realize that her longing for Zurvan came to me in the form of a dream.

This fact worries me in both senses of the word. After all, I'm arranged in such a way that such a phenomenon should be simply impossible.

The prayers I collect are bound to belong to the ashawans. My purpose is to create a miracle by collecting the goodwill that could overpower my father, and because of this I have no right to add extraneous impurities to it.

So unconsciously reading the thoughts of a drujwant, much less a king of evil, just doesn't fit in my mind, no matter how much I think about it. Even assuming it is the influence of one's environment, sympathy for the enemy's point of view is contrary to Avesta itself.

- Why on earth would I... also cry...

The moisture running down my cheeks does not bode well, which makes me want to shake it off immediately, but on the other hand, for some reason I want to keep this feeling longer, and this is also frightening. I'm even starting to think that I might have been subjected to some kind of psychic attack by Mashyana, when suddenly...

- How much longer are you going to sleep?!
- Guhoo!

Something heavy falls sharply on my stomach and knocks all the air out of me at once. From such a surprise I cannot say a word, and I already close my eyes to lose consciousness, but this time something starts to whip my cheeks.

- It's morning, time to get up.
- No, wait, wait a minute...

Who's that? It looks like someone is sitting on top of me, but neither my voice nor my impression is familiar. Such rough bodily contact immediately chases away the emotions that had possessed me after sleep, and when I open my eyes, tearful already for a completely different reason, I see...

- Are you awake? Good morning.
- Well, yes... Hello.

I really don't know her, though. She looks like an extremely perky little girl of about ten, but somehow I sense that she is not so simple.

Her big, round eyes are full of innocent curiosity and a strange maturity, but you can't tell one from the other... And anyway, I didn't notice it right away, but she's covered with feathers.

Apparently realizing that I'm beginning to guess, the girl identifies herself with a carefree smile.

- Pleased to meet you, beautiful. You can call me Ashozushta.

Ashozushta, the sacred bird that patronizes many Ashavans of the Air Burial Zone, embodied herself in this girl.

- Now, you get up, too.

While I can't get a word out of surprise, Ashozushta stops paying attention to me and starts kicking the sleeping Magsarion with her hands and feet. Of course, this is followed by an unsightly fight, but since it came out too fierce and pointless, we won't talk about it.

Be that as it may, this is how the day of the decisive battle with the fifth king of evil began.

- Incest, give me some jam.
- All right, but don't smear it too much. You never know when to stop, and before you know it, you'll be fat again.
- There's nothing to worry about over little things. A growing body needs to eat properly.
- You've already been living for seven hundred to eight hundred years, you stupid chicken!
- It hurts! Violence is not the answer!

Thus we began our breakfast, but before we dive into the commotion around the table, let me say one thing. Ashozushta, who was hit on the head by Zurvan and was shouting angrily, has no right to object to violence and the like. She is as good at fist-pumping as any of the others, for no particular reason.

It shows that she's not just a decent fighter in the Air Burial Zone, but she's so different from the image I have in my head that I can't get over the feeling of aloofness that has been created. No wonder I try to escape from it all to someone who also feels superfluous here.

- Come on, Magsarion, you need to eat your vegetables. How about some tea?
- Shut up. Stop talking to me non-stop, I'm sick of it.

But he's still himself, and he's not at all shy about expressing himself. Still hiding under a bag over his head, he still manages to chew on a bun. Seeing this, Ashozushta sighs wearily.

- What a rude young man he is. And he doesn't know how to behave at the table either. Is he really an Ashavan?
- I don't think Avesta would lie to you. He has his own circumstances, and I hope you can forgive him.
- How thoughtful of you. Are they really on such terms with each other, Zurvan?
- You never know. That would only make it more fun for me, but I hear it's your doing, Incest.
- ...
- Hey, are you even listening?
- Incest, Zurvan's talking to you.

- Huh? Oh, sorry. What were you saying?
- ...Nothing. I'm tired of the stupid show, I tell you.

I can't believe Zurvan is acting so sensibly, but there's no time for carefree laughter. Since we are about to go to battle with Mashyana herself, we still have much to discuss.

Since I don't want to do this in front of Magsarion, who is unaware of his regression to a child, I was about to ask him to leave, but as soon as breakfast comes to an end, he silently leaves the room himself. Relieved and sorry, I sit back down and turn to Ashozushta.

- I apologize for the delay, but let me introduce myself. My name is Quinn, and like Zurvan, I serve as a yazata of the holy kingdom. Please accept my thanks for sheltering us.
- Ah, never mind. For that matter, you barely made it, so it's me who should thank you-s.
- What are you talking about?

From her relaxed manner it did not seem that the matter was urgent, but evidently, for some reason, time is dear to her now. At my question Ashozushta for some reason turns to Incest, as if asking her permission, and then begins her story.

- You know about the power of star spirits, don't you? As long as we live on this planet, we can't go against its will. Well, like children who have to submit to the control of their parents-s.
- Yeah, so?

It goes without saying that the great determines the behavior of the small. There are times when the power of a star spirit comes into effect by its will, just as Kaikhosru can at any moment turn the population of a dragon's star remains into jewels, and there are times when it becomes part of its nature.

Power in the form of a law in force in a certain territory, for example, that no drujvants can be born in the holy kingdom. If we continue with the analogy of parents and children, it is also not difficult to understand. In fact, it is a kind of heredity.

- Mashyana's power is decay. Since she became so thirteen years ago, we have been decomposing with her, little by little. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we are slowly dying.
- Decay? I mean, really...
- You must have felt it a little, too. As a living creature, Mashyana has already come to an end. She is now a corpse that has begun to rot.

Incest interrupts to clarify what has been said, and it does seem to be true. So that explains the indescribable sense of uncleanness that Mashyana's stellar body was producing, like the smell going from overripe to rotten.

I suddenly think of Zurvan, turn to him, and see him frowning his eyebrows thoughtfully.

- So, is it my fault?

- Isn't it? Surely it's all explained by some nonsense like someone's behavior has discouraged her from living. So I'd like to see our lothario take responsibility for what he's done as well.

- I think... that's a little too much. Mashyana must also have her own circumstances, and frankly, I think it's a bit hasty to jump to conclusions...

- Why are you sticking up for her?

In response to this pertinent remark, Ashozushta only fluffs her feathers and smirks.

- That's the Incest man. We found her just as you disappeared, but, as you see, her point of view doesn't coincide with ours.

- So you've known her since I disappeared? So you don't know what she was doing until then too, Ash?

- Well, yes, even when I ask, she doesn't say.

Incest is undoubtedly ashawan, but she hardly indulges Mashyana. I've found this strange before, but it doesn't seem to be an isolated joke or pose. If she took Zurvan's place, it must have happened thirteen years ago... And if she's held that position all this time, she's a lot more stubborn than she seems.

- This may surprise you, but she has no malice, so I hope you will forgive her. Rather, it's because she's like that that she's useful to us, so maybe you'll think of her in that way.

- ...Well, she did help us out.

- Though she did give us a lot of trouble... Well, it's too late to complain about that now. We're used to weirdos.

We can agree with Ashozushta's logic: the fact that she is different from the others means that she is capable of something special. After all, you could say that about Zurvan, and about Magsarion. Even I myself am beginning to feel something in myself that is unbecoming of an Ashavan.

That dream... I still have no idea why I suddenly read Mashyana's memories and thoughts. To tell you the truth, I suspect there's a bug in my device, so I don't have the courage to talk about it now. Even if I told them something vague in every detail I could, it would only lead to unnecessary confusion.

While I'm speculating about all this, Ashozushta is whispering something in Incest's ear. I can't call this kind of behavior commendable in public, but since this is their home, rebuking them is unlikely to have any effect. Again, to pry into their own mouths...

So I have only to wait until they have finished discussing their plans. Incest turns to us and bows with a smile.

- Thank you for your generosity. I realize I'm acting a little strange, but it's just my nature that it's hard to fix. Perhaps I will still accidentally hurt your feelings, but I hope you will not be offended.

- Yeah, so about Mashyana...

- Oh, yeah, sorry to interrupt. Indeed, as a living organism, she's already dead, and everything in the Air Burial Zone is involved in the decay of Gaiaomart. Now only Ashozushta can resist more or less successfully.

- Without my gifts, everyone would be a zombie in no time. So don't forget my kindness.

Ashanka puffs her chest out proudly, but from what she has managed to say, they are now literally on the brink. Indeed, the power over decay is a ghastly force that cannot even be described by the word "repulsive".

A nature of filth that continues to exist even after death, infecting everything around it with its filth... For Ashavans, who attach great importance to their own lives, such an existence lacks the very foundation of morality.

- However, I could hardly have lasted thirteen years on my own. All this time we have held on precisely because of Incest.

- Does this have something to do with her strange influence on Mashyana?

- She herself explains it that way. Something that might strike her to the core.

- ...It's a long time to explain. But unfortunately, I can't finish her off.

Incest lowers her head disappointedly, and I try to summarize the conversation.



- You understand that she is dead, and therefore you can confront her. But because she's dead, you can't kill her, right?
- All in all, the logic is correct. If anyone can send her to her death once and for all, there's only one.

In response to the remark, in which one senses some hope, all eyes turn to one particular person.

- So that's how it is... I was going to do it anyway. You don't have to ask me to do it again.

Zurvan, though somehow reluctant, but confidently declares it, and Ashozushta sighs loudly with relief.

- Wonderful! I was afraid that you even now can not hold out and again will be stubborn s.
- Hey, what do you think I am?
- In short, a little boy? You're always acting like a bully, but in fact you worry a lot about little things, just like Mashyana.
- What did you say, let's go out!
- Oh, you want a fight? Do you want to fight?

I can't help but sigh that they've already decided to grab hold of each other here, but it's a relief to see that we've reached an agreement on our goal. If you look closely, Incest is also relieved to have a hand on his chest, and when he catches my eye, he bows to me again.

- Thank you again, Quinn. I've already told Zurvan, but when we get this whole thing sorted out, I'll be sure to tell him everything. About who I am.
- Good. Then you and Ashozushta can come back to the holy kingdom with us.
- I mean, do you think we'll be accepted as Yazata? It's a great honor, of course, but can we?
- Ultimately it's up to His Majesty to decide, but I don't think he'll mind.

After all, if all goes well, they will be an integral part of defeating the evil king. No one will be able to object to their initiation, and his majesty will probably be pleased with them. Even Samluk and Fehr might be cautious at first, but I'm sure they'll become friends in the end.

- Sounds like you've got some good comrades left over there. I can see it in your face.

- It's been a little over twenty-four hours since we parted, but I seem to miss them already. Strange, isn't it?

Just mentioning it makes me feel a little awkward, but it's a testament to how reliable my companions Fer and Samluk have become to me. And it is in order to meet them again with a smile that we need to defend this Air Burial Zone with dignity.

Until now, Ashozushta and the others have been forced to hold their defenses only because they lacked a decisive factor, and it is evident from their behavior that this problem has been solved with the return of Zurvan. So I decide to trust them as well, and I will not belatedly contradict them.

And so it remains for us to devise a concrete plan of how to get Zurvan to the core of Mashyana. More specifically, we need a way to overcome the barrier of endless petals and minions.

- I think if we combine our efforts, we can make a hole in Gayomart. However, an attack from the front doesn't seem reasonable to me: do you have any ideas about that?

Ashozushta answers the question addressed to Incest in her stead. Continuing to struggle with Zurvan, she turns to me with only one face and immediately declares:

- It is not a problem at all, you have me!

Her voice is full of confidence, but because of her straightforwardness, I can't understand what she's talking about. I look so puzzled that Incest continues the thought with a smirk.

- Ashozushta is actually an owl, so she's a master of disguise. Anyway, she has some sort of stealth gift.

- Will we be able to sneak right up close to Mashyana undetected?

- Well, we won't be able to fly right in, and we won't be too active. But it's probably enough for our purpose.

- Indeed, our role is only to clear the way.

If we manage to at least let Zurvan penetrate the stellar body, our work is almost complete. To make a hole in that huge tree, we'd have to strike up close and hard, and I have no reason to

doubt that stealth-dar will do the trick. Of course, nothing can be done about the fact that in doing so we will be spotted, and the rest will come down to a battle in time.

It will be enough for Zurvan to defeat Mashyana before we are destroyed. On the other hand, the longer we hold out, the easier it will be for Zurvan to act.

- Roger that. I think it makes sense to bet on this strategy.

I nod, determined to do whatever it takes to make the operation a success. I've known before that owls can fly silently, and Ashozushta has proven her prowess by successfully avoiding Mashyana for thirteen years now. I suppose she could have even demonstrated to us how accurately she could apply her invisibility, but instead she met us in human form-maybe to strengthen her relationship with us.

- Hey, that hurt! Don't bite, bird or otherwise!

- Shut up! Taste my beak!

...Although, how should I put it... Recognizing her as the sacred bird of silence and harmony doesn't work at all.

- By the way, Quinn. There's something else we need to discuss, if you don't mind.

- A?

I didn't expect to be addressed in such a serious tone, and I involuntarily flinched. When I turn around, I see that Incest is looking at me with a suspiciously meek look. The left hand on the table was clenched tightly in a fist... I hadn't noticed until now that a strange ring glittered on her ring finger. Since I do not feel anything in it, I must assume that it is an ordinary piece of jewelry, and yet, for some reason, it attracts my attention.

But the next thing I know, the words of Incest are chasing away the questions in my head.

- I want him... for Magsarion to accompany us in battle as well.

- He can't!

I involuntarily, almost automatically, refuse her. I stand up, tossing my chair aside, and Zurvan and Ashozushta turn to me in surprise.

I can't hear anything over my heartbeat. I can feel my face getting redder and redder, and my thoughts are hopelessly confused. Incest's words were phrased as a "request," so you wouldn't call it an "order," but it feels like the first time I've so abruptly rejected someone else's will.

Why am I acting this way? No, I understand that. That's why it hurts so much.

- I understand how you feel, but unfortunately, it's not up for discussion. I told you: to defeat Mashyana, we need his help.

Only Incest remains calm, and that makes me almost hate her. Following this, she simply and yet firmly tells me her will.

- Let me say it again: I want to take Magsarion into battle.

An order so weighty that it would rival my father's... It was probably the first time I'd ever wanted to curse my own device.

\*\*\*

Magsarion was on the hill where we spoke to him yesterday. Proudly standing at his small stature, looking down on the village and the working villagers.

I wonder what he's thinking, and I know I can read it, but I don't feel much inclination to. Right now he is not a raging knight, feared even by his allies, but a lonely child who is unsure how he should live his life. What he will choose, what answer he will find, how he will enter adulthood... I want only to watch him grow up.

But, of course, this wish is not destined to come true. I understand that this is not really who he is, and the current Magsarion is something of a dream, and so it goes without saying that he will wake up from it at some point. My real duty is to make every effort to bring him back to consciousness. After all, I cannot forever conceal from him that twenty years have passed since the great hero's death.

And yet...

If I may, let this moment last a little longer, an eternity. Ah, it turns out I must be dreaming now.

If our relationship were to begin from this moment, what would it become... This selfish question seems unbearably beautiful to me. I don't want to lose Magsarion, whom I can touch, whom I can talk to, who awkwardly but tries to get close to me.

I involuntarily think I want to protect him.

- What do you want?

I wonder what the look on my face was when I heard his gruff voice? I try to smile, but maybe I look like I'm confused.

I'm so embarrassed by this that I can't look him in the face, instead standing behind a tree as if hiding from him. Leaning my back against the trunk, I turn to Magsarion standing behind it.

- I have a favor to ask of you. Would you listen to me?

- It depends on what kind of request. Just tell me, what are you doing there?

- Nothing much. You also hide your face: you can consider that we are on an equal footing.

It's surprisingly easy to talk. A tired sigh is heard on the other side of the tree, prompting me to tell you why I'm here.

- Are you good at physical exercise?

- What?

- Is anything hard to frighten you with?

- Hey, wait a minute...

- If I told you that you might die in the near future, what would you do?

Hearing the question, Magsarion becomes silent. To my surprise, however, I realize that he's not at a loss for words, but that he's seriously considering it.

What a clever boy. Perhaps it's my overly awkward leading questions, but he seems to have figured out what I'm getting at.

- I have to fight to get back to my brother. Did I get that right?

- ...Yes, I'm glad you figured it out quickly.

"No," I censure myself in my heart. Even if we successfully defeat Mashyana and return to the sacred realm, Lord Varhran is no longer there. The day when you meet your elder brother face to face and rid yourself of your regrets is unlikely ever to come.

I am now trying to force you back into this ruthless reality. To the place where you are a blood-stained, raging knight who himself has said there is no turning back, and curses all that lies ahead.

When he returns, where will the present boy disappear to? Perhaps if we do not destroy Mashyagh, but successfully gain possession of him, this Magsarion can be protected, but only if he is allowed to remain in the rear.

If you bring him to the battlefield, there must be a fierce struggle to gain possession of him, and the others hope that in the process the Mashyagh can be destroyed.

- Frankly, you will definitely have to face some serious danger. I will also be very busy and will not be able to keep an eye on you all the time.

So I understand that the Magsarion I'm talking to now will disappear anyway. Our battle together will be his last, and his only options are to be killed by Mashyana or by himself.

- Perhaps-no, almost certainly you will die. But the younger brother of Lord Varhran certainly wouldn't be afraid of something like that, would he?

I try to put it down to a joke, but I am essentially clinging to the possibility. I walk the line between formally complying with the Incest request and violating the Commandment by actually imposing my will.

Please let this childish threat work, and you will be frightened as befits your age. Even the fact that I used the forbidden words "little brother of a hero" is due to my desire to get him to say no.

Then let your team change my priority. If you confess to me wholeheartedly that you are afraid and do not want to go, I can protect who you are now. This dream will continue, and may yet surpass reality...

My plea is wilful enough, yet, to my surprise, it creates a real miracle.

- Why are you crying?

- ...A?

I can't immediately guess what he's talking about. I can hear the words themselves, but I can't understand their meaning.

After all, my acting was flawless, and my voice didn't even waver. Magsarion shouldn't see my face, and besides, I didn't think he could sympathize with the others in any way.

He said himself that everything in the world disgusted him. He called everything unpleasant and incomprehensible noise. But then why did he...

- ...Agh!

...Did he notice that I was crying? And also in such a gentle, slightly annoyed, but as if pitying voice?

That's not fair. It's a kind of cowardice. If you open up to me like that, it'll be harder for me to leave you. I mean, I'll give it all up and try to run away with you.

- I'm not... crying.

- Well, you are crying.

- I'm saying I'm not... I'm not crying!

- ...That's ridiculous.

It's out of my mouth. Anyway, did you hear what I said?

- I said you were going to die. Aren't you scared?

- Scared? I don't know. But I think it might help me to see my brother somehow.

- ...

- It's weird, isn't it? I mean, he gets out of the most hopeless situation alive.

- Yeah, it's weird. So strange...

...that I, on the contrary, get angry, which is why...

- I won't let you die. And I won't let you meet your brother.

Stepping out of the shadows of the tree, I embrace the unresponsive little Magsarion.

- Che... Stop it, what are you talking about?!

He only shows surprise for a moment, and then he immediately starts twitching and demanding to let go of him, but I don't listen and I just enclose him even more tightly in my arms.

- I told you I couldn't let such a rude man meet a great hero. Besides, you haven't finished your training yet.

- Huh? Wait, what are you talking about?

- Did you forget that you decided to train on me? That's why it's too early for you.

So that someday, when he does get to see Lord Varhran, he can do so without regrets. Since he said he agreed to stay with me despite having to endure such abominations, I don't want him to be stuck halfway through.

- Until you are trained, I won't let you go. Remember this well: I'm used to doing every job I'm assigned.

Yes, remember that. Don't forget that.

Whatever happens from now on, I will not let the Magsarion in front of me disappear without a trace.

I swear, if anyone thinks otherwise, I will never forgive them.

### 3

- Ah, can you hear me all right, ladies and gentlemen? Something curious is about to happen. Depending on the circumstances, I may need your participation, so don't let me down. It's going to be fun!

The voice goes off on its own, and you can't tell that anyone is expecting an answer to it. But somehow I can't call it a meaningless monologue, either.



This voice has definitely reached specific recipients, and "they" undoubtedly hear it. The fact that no one responds to it anyway is due only to the fact that this one-sided act of communication makes everyone cringe.

They are literally forced to keep company, to listen to whatever nonsense comes into their interlocutor's head. Instead of listening to all this, it is far better to leave the doors closed and let everything pass their ears, waiting for this lengthy chatter to come to an end. A careless response can only cause more excitement and more conversation.

This compulsion to supernatural gathering is actually not much different from gatha. The differences boil down to the fact that they can only exchange voices and that the initiator is always obvious to all.

This time there is someone who dares to get involved in this spectacle, ignored by all. The result of this extremely rare phenomenon is a two-way conversation in a highly suspicious format.

- Nadare, what's going on?

- Oh, Mashyana! I see you're in an extremely bad mood today, too.

As you might expect, Nadare's voice grows a tone louder as a result. As if unable to contain her joy, she starts gibbering enthusiastically one word after another.

- Of course, it's not much different from your usual state, and yet I didn't expect you to suddenly decide to answer me. I'm glad you wanted to ask me for advice I'm happy to help you in any way I can, of course, but you'll have to be more specific to do so. Your question is a little vague, so I don't know what to say to you.

Mashyana responds with an obvious click of her tongue. In fact, she probably doesn't want her company either. It's not just that Nadare herself annoys her, but that the rest of the evil kings hear them. She phrased her question in this way only because she did not want to give them unnecessary information.

However, Nadare seems to be deaf to such subtleties. Let it be in a non-serious way, but it tells her that specifics are needed for advice. Yelling at her would not be difficult, but then the negotiations would immediately come to an end.

She won't be able to get the answer she's looking for. Besides, Mashyana doesn't have time for that.

- ...My property has stopped working properly. I want to know what the reason is.
- Hmm? Isn't that the bling that gave birth to your soulmate? If so, I think you'd better ask Khvarenah, not me.
- There are no mistakes in my creations.

As soon as I mention his name, he joins the conversation. No one seems to have expected him to do that, and you can feel someone holding their breath, but Destruction Workshop is in no way embarrassed by that. Before an even more overjoyed Nadare begins to scratch his tongue, he articulates his own point clearly and systematically.

- I don't know "which" of my children you have now, but I recognize their autonomy. That's why I don't interfere in their existence or discuss with them exactly how they should live with their partners. If their desire is to live and die as they please, it is up to their function-wherever they are and whatever they do.
- But a phenomenon has occurred that is clearly different from what I know.
- Apparently, you simply didn't realize its true nature. I repeat: my offspring are incapable of mistakes. They are not and cannot be.

With that, it's as if Khvarenah decides that's the end of the conversation, and he shuts up again. Only Nadare's voice remains, holding back laughter with some surprise.

- Apparently, he cares more for his children than he seems to. Since he swears so much on the honor of the children, your treasure just can't be broken. If something incomprehensible has happened, you'd better look for the cause in your own lack of knowledge, Mashyana.

Either regarding the function of the artifact or something else. As annoying as this is, it is safe to say that the conversation was not in vain, as she learned of her own ignorance. The fifth king of evil puts up with such an answer and decides to ask one more question, now that she has the opportunity.

- What event were you talking about?
- Specifically, I can't figure it out yet. It's just that I'm a little different in that sense than you are, and my nose for it is a little sharper.
- Hmm, I see. "Collapse," huh?

She already knew that. No one had clearly explained it to her, but it wasn't hard to guess the origin of Nadare for the most part.

Clearly, then, it will happen again. However, Mashyana decides it has nothing to do with her, and she is silent as well.

- The changing colors are always so beautiful. It's because I can't hold back the shivers every time that I think it must never happen again.

Nadare's lengthy monologue is no longer being listened to, and yet the ancient king of evil continues, unconcerned.

- But I'm still so eager to see it, so agonizing over the decision... Perhaps I, too, am thinking this way out of my own ignorance. In that case, omniscience would surely be like death. For then nothing would be enjoyable.

Even after hearing such a statement, which draws a line under the monologue, the other six remain speechless.

#### ***Chapter 8: Disappearing into the Sky(part 4-5)***



The Air Burial Zone is enormous. If Ashozushta is to be believed, it once included seven planets that were swallowed up by Mashyana and became part of it.

In other words, the fifth king of evil devoured six of her brothers, including the planet that was once Zurvan. All of them had been close to each other before, and their inhabitants often

traveled back and forth, which caused a lot of conflicts. For example, a kind of patriotism and disputes over what is a planet and what are its satellites.

It sounds silly, but in fact it probably served only as a pretext. Any war is based on Avesta, which means that any other reasons are nothing more than foolishness or a formality.

While praising their planet as the best, in reality no one even thought of it. Such is the real history of the Air Burial Zone, and of all seven planets, only Mashyana and Zurvan have gained an ego. The fact that they both care so much about their seniority can be called ironic, which also corresponds to my dream.

But according to the dream, she created her younger brother, weary of being alone and praying to the artifact that was in her possession...

- What's the matter, Quinn, what are you looking at?

- No, I'm fine.

Anyway, here we are, flying across the vast Air Burial Zone to fight Mashyana. Teleportation is a powerful technique, and as such, it's easy to spot; if we're suddenly under the enemy's nose, we'll only bring unnecessary danger upon ourselves. So we decided to fly to the very edge of Mashyana's perception once, and then fly to it from there. It is slow, but since secrecy is our first priority, we must proceed with caution.

We've been flying for more than five hours and can already see the stellar body of the evil king, but it doesn't look like we're getting anywhere near it - which once again speaks to the enormous size of the enemy. As fear rises in me again, I gather my will into a fist, waiting for the battle to begin.

- We need to bring this huge tree down, don't we?

- Yes... Well, that's what we're going to do, so you should worry about solving your own problem. What's eating you, what you want to do... Now your job is to find answers.

- ...Okay. I don't get it, but I'll give it a try.

Flying hand in hand behind me, Magsarion nods unsophisticatedly. The fact that he doesn't feel an ounce of fear is most likely due not to excessive courage, but to his unique point of view.

As if thinking something amusing, Zurvan intervenes from the sidelines:

- So you still see everything around you as one disgusting pile of shit. As always, you can be relied upon, I'm even glad.
- Do I know you?
- Sure you do. Apparently you don't remember me, but you and I go way back. I hope it doesn't take long for your memory to come back.
- Zurvan, that's enough.

I look at him and ask him not to say anything unnecessary. I'm still trying my best to hide from Magsarion the fact that, from his point of view, reality is twenty years ahead of us. Even without considering my own opinion, his confusion in the here and now won't do us any good.

- What a henchwoman you are, Quinn. Do you really think he's happy being a piece of shit?
- Leave me alone. I'm the one assigned to keep an eye on him.

I wave him off, and Incest almost apologizes:

- Well, Quinn's right about that. I won't argue with you about your plans anymore, either.
- I'll be grateful to you for that.
- That's cold. It looks like I've already been disliked here, but at least let me thank you. You did agree to a whole bunch of my incomprehensible conditions.

I don't answer that, but I squeeze Magsarion's hand harder.

I can't say I dislike Incest. I realize that strategically taking him with me in a decisive battle is indeed necessary.

Besides, as Zurvan said, the real Magsarion would probably let my attempts to keep him out of the way.

And yet that's why I vowed to protect the little one. Even if, very soon, the past twenty years of harsh reality were to cover his head, I wanted the boy standing here to leave his mark.

I'd like him to make at least the slightest difference to the fierce knight's way of life. Since regrets are an important part of Magsarion, one cannot make him get rid of them completely, like a stain on a garment.

A true ashawan does not curse shame or regret, but accepts them for what they are, continuing to stand on their own feet.

Perhaps carrying one's own crimes within oneself and living one's life of punishment is really hard, but that's the kind of hero I want Magsarion to be.

I surpassed my father's orders and decided to keep Magsarion company in "training" until the very end. I believe that if, as a result, we bind ourselves by some new bond, I will be able to meet Magsarion, who is different from the previous one.

- I get it. I don't have time to worry about others anyway. I just wanted to take this opportunity to tell you that you are my ideal, Magsarion.

- ...In what way?

- Well, literally, but since your babysitter is so noisy, you can figure the rest out for yourself. You're not the type to listen to what others say anyway, are you?

- ...

- I'm counting on you, so don't let me down. Especially since we may never see each other again.

Zurvan teases fate with a smile, but he does not show his usual non-seriousness. He is also, in his manner, anticipating further developments and sincerely intends to part with his life as befits him.

This means that everyone is exceptionally serious. Myself and Magsarion, Incest and Zurvan all have their reasons for considering this a case where there is no turning back. The Fifth Evil King is an obstacle that cannot be bypassed, and it is now safe to say that her or our death is inevitable.

Even the fact that Ashozushta is nowhere to be seen shows that she is determined, though not as determined as the rest of us. Since she should be the next star spirit, her main task now is to ensure the safety of the villagers under her charge.

This means she can't fight alongside us while they remain on her back, and even in the guise of a girl this remains difficult. After years of fighting the power of Mashyana, Ashozushta is quite exhausted, and in this condition, fighting in her already fragile human form would be true suicide.

Rather, I am even grateful to her for covering our rear, literally holding the future of the Air Burial Zone on her shoulders. We now have virtually unlimited gifts of flight, stealth, and even teleportation within the planet. As support, this is more than enough.

Of course, that doesn't negate our small numbers, but we use our fighters and strategy as effectively as possible. If there is anything else to discuss, it is one thing, and that is what I choose to talk about.

- Do we know anything about the Commandment of Mashyana?

I already know about her power of decay, but her Commandment is still a mystery. Even when we fought her, we couldn't figure it out.

- If we know it, we can figure out how to counter it. Could you tell us about him?

- Alas, I don't know him.

- You don't?

- You of all people should know that I don't lie.

I have nothing to say to such a direct answer. Indeed, Zurvan does not tolerate lies, and it is not as if he suddenly decided to keep secrets.

Still, I am not sure if this is possible. That the master of finding other people's vulnerabilities and getting on his opponent's nerves couldn't find out the truth of his older, younger sister, whom he has been at war with for years, strikes me as a bit odd.

- It's all over your face, Quinn. Even I can only guess at things that didn't happen at all.

- Are you telling me that Mashyana doesn't have a Commandment?

- At least thirteen years ago she didn't.

Snorting with a tired look, Zurvan begins to explain.

- It's quite common for star spirits. You take a vow to acquire a power, and if nothing compels you to lack it, no one will want you to. Think of how it went for you.

- Really... I guess that's where you're right.

Immediately after I was born, I was thrown into outer space, and I called upon Avesta, because I had to gain power as soon as possible. Of course, there are different cases, but I suppose that most often the Commandment is taken out of haste or dissatisfaction.

In that case, star spirits, who are born extremely powerful, are indeed rarely in this situation. Judging from the memories that came to me in my dream, the ego-found Mashyana was content with everything up to the time Zurvan betrayed her. One could say that the encounter with her one and only older brother made her world perfect.

- I might add that their perception of time is quite different from that of humans. We had been fighting for fourteen or fifteen years, but it felt like an instant. Compared to our way of being, it's too short.

- But you were both ready to give up your lives in the end. But as a result, for thirteen years you had to walk a different path... You must have thought about that.

- Well, yes. Of course, some things have changed in us since then.

Both of them have had unforeseen experiences--Zurvan as a man, Mashyana as a dead man and they have certainly experienced the need to change. So, like he said, they just couldn't stay the same.

- Now she has the Commandment. Is that a hunch you could call right?

- After all, she is a mirror image of me. But I can't say anything concrete.

If you think about it, Zurvan's Commandment also remains a mystery. According to his words, thirteen years ago he had no fetters either, which means that he gained his present world view when he joined the Yazatas. Became one whose true gut is so hard to discern, clear and yet not.

Throughout our conversation, Magsarion remains silent-apparently completely indifferent to him. The other present with a suspiciously haggard face...

- I know the Commandment of Mashyana.

As soon as Incest whispers it, something unforeseen happens.

- ...Huh?!

The ocean of clouds below us is pierced by the woody tentacle of Mashyana... No, it's a kindred tree, but not a cherry.



A plum or peach, or maybe something else resembling their appearance. However, the tree that appeared before us and rapidly covered the heavens is not inferior in size to the king of evil... It can already be quite called the second stellar body.

What is it? A close subordinate of Mashyana? It can't be... I've never heard of such a thing.

And anyway, where has he been hiding all this time? Not not noticing such a huge threat until we're up close and personal is just too weird, no matter how you look at it.

It's almost as if he just came out of nowhere.

- Oh, shit, you got it figured out already? Ashka is good for nothing!

Zurvan curses and pulls out his gun. There's no telling what's caused this sudden development, but we have to assume we've been spotted. Which means all we have to do is gather our strength, and when I'm already covering Magsarion, getting ready to fight back...

- Wait! We still haven't been spotted!

...I hear Incest shouting from the side. We look at her with surprise, and she continues quietly.

- Look, it's holding still. If we move now, we'll only bring more trouble.

Indeed, the mystery tree may be spreading its branches and foliage with an ominous noise, but it doesn't seem to be paying attention to us. The gift of stealth still renders us invisible, and we can guess that it did not originate here to fight.

- But in that case, what is it? Did you know that there are others besides Mashyana, Zurvan?

- No, it's the first time I've seen one. There is a strange resemblance between them, but I don't remember any imitators.

We keep our distance carefully, when suddenly the second stellar body lets out a roar that makes my hair stand on end. It still can't see us, and yet this battle cry is full of hostility that tears the whole body apart... We duck to avoid being accidentally thrown back, and Incest reveals an unexpected truth to us.

- It's Mashyagh. Apparently she decided to try it out just in case.

So this is the effect of the devil's artifact...? Magsarion's voice overlays this shocking phrase.

- Hey, another one showed up!

- What?!

The foul cherry shakes the heavens, shortens its distance in an instant, and pounces on the newfound foe. Like a flycatcher, the branches part suddenly and plunge their fangs into the mysterious tree, shattering and crushing a trunk the size of a continent.

A howl erupts. A storm of pale pink petals and blood splatter.

A spectacular act of destruction, as if one planet is consuming another. Two enormous living things clash in a struggle that literally rips the sky and the earth apart.

She's devouring it.

Yes, Mashyana is reveling in a creature that looks like herself right before our eyes. Perhaps claiming unchallenged rule of the Air Burial Zone, or perhaps playing out the scene of Zurvan's assassination. In the face of the tyranny unfolding, the gluttony of titanic proportions, I can neither move nor utter a word.

I can see that Zurvan at my side is also deprived of his usual smile. A moment later, however, he shakes his head and frowns his eyebrows.

- Tell me. What is it?

- ...

- Please explain what is happening in a way that we can understand.

Incest does not respond in any way, and I also ask her a question, which causes her to suddenly look at me with a surprised look. The girl in the man's suit, who also remains a mystery, hurriedly stretches out and begins to speak, as if trying to hide her recent embarrassment.

- ...Uh-huh, yeah. Well, that's Mashyagh power. Apparently, once Magsarion had appropriated it, she wanted it back.

- And that's what gave birth to this fake? I don't see the connection, you're obviously not telling me something.

- ...

- Don't ignore me. Why are you always...

- Wait, Zurvan, let me ask you something.

Obviously, communication between them involves serious difficulties. The reason may be either the respect Incest has for Zurvan or something else. It is impossible to say for sure, but in this case it is not so important. There is no time to ask about it now.

The only one who understands what's going on is Incest, and I'm the only one who can have a normal conversation with her right now. So it would be better for me to postpone trivialities until better times and do my job as a mediator.

Indeed, the fact that Mashyana has approached us is our chance. We need to exchange the information we have now, while the stealth still works.

- This imitation we don't want to speculate much, let's call it that-according to you, was born from the power of Mashyagh. Indeed, given how suddenly it appeared, it's quite possible that it was literally just born. However...

There's still something I can't understand. Why did Mashyana attack her?

- Even if she really wanted to take possession of Magsarion, why would she behave so irrationally to create new enemies for herself? If she could create allies or kill us, it would be natural to do so.

I assumed that Mashyagh could read its owner's mind and grant his wishes, but apparently I was wrong? Earlier you said you couldn't tell me about it, but honestly, I haven't stopped wondering about it since.

- I'm sure you can't let it go now. You have your orders, Quinn, tell her.

Having received this encouragement, I nod and utter the decisive words.

- Answer us, Incest, this is Zurvan's request.

- ...Ahem!

Immediately thereafter, her restlessness and indecision become visible to the naked eye.

Incest is weak to Zurvan. Because of the Commandment, I can't pry anything out of her, but I serve as his representative now, and so she will hardly be able to refuse.

For about ten seconds, she is merely dejectedly silent. After that, Incest apparently makes a decision, sighs, and looks up.

She smiles, but as if about to cry... and says something strange.

- Quinn. Tell me, where is Zurvan now?

- What...?

It's a wish I can't understand. For one thing, she never answered my question, which makes her look even more suspicious.

This means that I should feel at least some dissatisfaction, but for some reason I don't.

Not because of the power or the weight of the prayer-I just can't resist the quiet voice of Incest...

- There... Standing there looking right at you.

As I have been asked, I tell her the location of Zurvan. Incest nods appreciatively at me and turns to where I pointed.

After which she begins to speak sadly. As if with a loved one who is in an unattainably distant parallel world, calm but maddeningly sad.

- Mashyana's commandment is a mirror. She has always been alone, burdened by loneliness... And when she was finally betrayed by the unique treasure she found, she decided never to part with anyone again. She has no tolerance for unrequited feelings, finding them false.

- Hey, wait, what are you doing all of a sudden?

Incest doesn't answer the question. As if she does not look at Zurvan at all.

She tells not of the true essence of Mashyagh, but of the Promise of the Fifth King of Evil, but it does not seem as if they are entirely unrelated to each other.

Incest speaks of the mystery of Mashyagh as if she had seen it firsthand.

No, as if... As if she were remembering something deeply personal.

- An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This is her chosen way of life. Hate for hate, blow for blow. "That time" when her very existence was disregarded brought her so much pain that she began to believe: if she became a mirror, she would be seen for sure.

...However, Mashyana never understood. That when you are loved, love must be reciprocated. That a life based on such reflected feelings just couldn't satisfy her.

Mirror- In other words, Incest is saying that the Commandment of Mashyana is a kind of counter-attack through imitation. Aggression against the Immovability of Impurity becomes a blade of the same quality and weight, turning against the aggressor. Because she does not want to disagree with anyone. Because she finds unrequited feelings false.

Does this mean that the struggle unfolding before us was inevitable, because the phony turned her unkind gaze on Mashyana?

However, if this is so, what is her intent? If she is so afraid of difference that she is willing to continue this machine pantomime, isn't this kind of farce far more fake?

- That's why I'd like to save this fool. You will have to experience real despair, but I still want to show her that at the end of this journey she will surely reach the place of her dreams. And in order to do so...

Pausing for a moment, Incest draws his gun. Then turns it to Mashyana, stands up, and a mysterious light gathers around the weapon once more.

- ...Now I "must" do this.

- Wai...

Without giving us time to stop her, she pulls the trigger, and the light projectile hits exactly the fifth king of evil. The shockwave from the blast shakes the huge Gayomart, and the continental plate-shifting deformation of the cherry tree trunk forms a hole.

I didn't even have to do anything - Incest accomplished this on its own. This means that we have successfully overcome the first phase of our plan, but due to arbitrary contrary to the agreements, our reaction is delayed for a couple of moments.

It's as if that's exactly the delay she wanted to take advantage of.

- I love you, Zurvan. Ever since I wasn't even born, for a long, long time, I've adored you with no memory.

Incest kisses Zurvan. A quiet kiss that touches him lightly and disappears like the wind.

- Even after death. Until the end of time.

That fleeting smile is swallowed by a wave of branches and leaves the very next moment.

- Incest!

The gift of secrecy falls at the first touch. No matter how you spin it, you can only pretend to be "what you're not" while you're doing nothing.

Exactly according to the knowledge I had gained by attacking Mashyana, Incest gave herself away. As the principle of "an eye for an eye" dictates, she disappeared in a jiffy after receiving the evil king's retaliatory strike.

The fact that we weren't too far away but were perfectly unharmed may be explained by the fact that Mashyana's Commandment is ultimately the embodiment of retribution. But we don't need to speculate now.

- Fuck you.... Why on earth would you do something like that without asking?

Zurvan, writhing in fury, flies straight for the hole to save the swallowed Incest.

We are left behind, stunned to see the Gayomart looming before us.

- ...I don't really understand. Is there really anything else I can do now?

Magsarion's whisper is inappropriately cold, but I have no answer.

Mashyana has already finished devouring the counterfeit, and now she's trapped Zurvan inside her as well.

In the silence, only the storm of cherry petals continues its seductive dance... as if shedding tears of joy.

5

Common sense tells that Incest is already dead. The density of the vegetation that swallowed her up was so high that I couldn't see her death in person, but that hardly needs further confirmation. What I saw was more than enough to draw conclusions, especially since she was already much more fragile than the others.

This means that there should be not even a bone left of her, not just a corpse. Anyone would take this as absolute truth, but Zurvan firmly denies it. Not logically, but intuitively, he is certain that Incest is alive.

A mysterious girl. An unpleasant girl. And yet for some reason he cannot leave her, despite the fact that the more he gets involved with her, the more she knocks him out.

She seems to be his natural enemy, but that doesn't mean he wants her dead. Rather, it even seems to him that it is in the company of someone like her that he can remain himself.

- What foolishness, I am not a child.

As he continues to fly inside Gayomart, Zurvan exhales wearily. He can't help but feel the urge to poke fun at himself: "Why is some unfortunate kiss making you so angry?"

In fact, he has no time to chase two birds with one stone. He has firmly made up his mind to face Mashyana this time, which means that if he is distracted by other women, he will only bring destruction upon himself. His older, younger sister was as far from tolerating such frivolities as anyone.

Even understanding all this logically, Zurvan still looks at both girls from the same angle. He does not put them on two different scales, but rather hardly views them as two different entities.

Thinking of Mashyana will make Incest happy, and if he protects Incest, he will save Mashyana. This paradox, which comes out of nowhere, seems to go beyond all reasonable limits of debauchery, and yet somehow the certainty of it is so firm.

And so, though he scoffs at his own search for Incest, he does not consider it a wrong decision. Just because the right path has never been prepared for him by anyone else.

- I will do what I want to do, the way I want to do it. That's my decision.

Whispering this, he removes the gift of flight and sinks to the surface of his little sister. Both the floor and the dome above are a tree cave, but there is no sense of cramped space at all.

That's because this womb of a cherry tree is as big as an entire continent. It could well be called a world in its own right: a boundless temple where many living beings have inhabited since before Mashyana acquired her identity. Indeed, the eye cannot even grasp the entire expanse that stretches far beyond the horizon.

Compared to this grandeur, the hole Incest has made is only the eye of a needle. The space, with no end in sight, is filled with an astronomical number of cherry trees, intricately beautiful... and yet fleeting and sad.

Like a mirage melting before my eyes. A beauty whose end is foregone, and which it is too late to help.

The relentless storm of crumbling cherry petals like blood, representing Mashyana's current state.

- You've come, have you? So, come to me, Zurvan.

As soon as he touches the bark with his feet, a woman's voice echoes from all sides. Stern, yet passionate, burning with a flame of irrepressible hatred.

- Put an end to it.

Instead of obeying, Zurvan takes out his cigarette, takes a drag, and only then opens his mouth.

- First tell me, where's that girl you dragged in here? I won't ask for her back, but at least show me where she is.

He doesn't ask if she's alive. You don't even have to ask that, so he's only interested in her whereabouts. He expects that such an impertinent question will provoke anger in Mashyana, but she answers in an unexpectedly quiet voice.

- Look to your right.



Like the waves of the sea, a storm of petals part to the sides. Indeed, on Zurvan's right hand under a particularly large cherry tree lies Incest. As far as he can see, she is only unconscious; there are no visible wounds on her.

Couldn't kill her, or decided not to? Or maybe both?

Perhaps the answer to this question can decide his future fate, but Zurvan remains indifferent to it. For him at least, Mashyana and Incest are equivalent and equal.

Therefore, it does not seem possible for him to make only one of them disappear, and now that he is convinced of this, he can leave Incest here. He does not choose one of the two: whichever one he chooses, the result will be the same.

Even if the grounds for such certainty remain unclear.

- Is that satisfactory to you?

- Yes, I am satisfied. Lead the way.

Be that as it may, he will know the answer soon enough. Moments before Mashyana teleports him, Zurvan is embraced by the pale pink wind and ponders.

So, how exactly will it all end?

There is much he wants to do and say, but what exactly the future holds for him after this, he does not know. Will everything change at the last second, or will nothing change at all?

In any case, he will live as he sees fit. Whatever shape the world takes, as long as he lives according to the oath he took after he was reborn, he'll be fine.

Quinn might call such a decision irresponsible, but she'll have to live with it. After all, it is the chaos that cannot be foreseen or guessed that is his ideal.

- Chaos is far better. The conversation won't be easy, but the world is more interesting just when problems aren't solved in one go.

Strange as it may seem, there may be a real victory waiting to be born... So it seems to Zurvan.

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My heart flutters in my chest. The ring finger is like a flame. The primordial ring beats a hot rhythm, heralding the coming of the promised hour.

"Soon, soon I will meet him," Mashyana sits in the unknown depths of the decaying Gayomart, and her funeral-mask-like beautiful face stretches into a smile.

In Mashyag work, however, no mistake has arisen. Putting her desire into it by force of self, she will receive exactly the blessing she expects. Since she was able to test this principle again without any problem, the only cause for concern disappeared.

Indeed, Khvarenah was right: it was all her own ignorance and ignorance that was to blame. Even the heavens she rules are still full of truths unknown to her.

But so what? She had won. She has brought it back to herself.

Now that she has regained supremacy, she no longer intends to lose it. Yes, she is ignorant, but by the constant control of Mashyagh, without any indulgence, she can avoid unforeseen results.

This is more than enough: if no one intervenes in the little time it takes her, she is fine.

She does not expect to survive this fight anyway, and her body is already in the arms of death - festering, smoldering, decaying.

- Both victory and defeat will herald my end. The question of victory and defeat is so vulgar that it is not worth thinking about.

Expressing complete indifference, Mashyana exhales a sweetly rotten, flower-like spirit. The cherry trees that make up the throne rustle like scavengers circling overhead.

- I know that, having been born with you, I am destined to die with you. I believe that this is how our relationship will reach perfection... Ah, I've been waiting for you, Zurvan.

The King of Evil smiles enchantingly at the man who emerges from the swirling swirl of petals.

Surrounded by the lusciously sweet scent of spoilage, the two stand and merely gaze at each other. Now that they have met thirteen years later, no opening remarks are needed.

Dropping his smoked cigarette, Zurvan pulls out his pistol, and Mashyana, who is on her feet, elegantly unfolds the floral fan.

The mystical silence is broken by the noise of a cannon shot - and thus becomes the ruthless signal to begin.

From a purely arithmetical point of view, the difference between the battle potentials of the two sides is like heaven and earth. Now that Mashyana is deprived of her enormous star body, her brute strength and endurance are reduced to a minimum, but that doesn't make her vulnerable at all. A star spirit, a being of an inherently higher order, is at its very core on an entirely different level.

If it were only a first-rank Daevas, it could still kill mobs with its bare hands. Furthermore, in this state, when she has gathered her essence in one place, her willpower is many times greater than in the form of a stellar body.

This means that, despite the loss of physical characteristics, special abilities like the Commandments or the power of a star spirit pose a far greater threat precisely in humanoid form.

The fact that Mashyana is one of the seven creatures standing atop the universe generally remains valid. What does Zurvan represent in comparison to her?

He may have also been a star spirit before, but as a result of his rebirth he has become an ordinary human. Even if he possesses the skills that set him apart from the other yazatas, fighting the evil king one-on-one is nothing short of reckless. Simply put, he is no match for her.

The willful Zurvan can hardly be seen as a hero serving as a representative of all the goodwill in the world, which means that a miracle is unlikely to come upon him. Consequently, even though they are each other's older brother and sister, their worlds are so different as to make you weep. Whatever emotions they put into this confrontation, it is unlikely that anything will come out of it except a one-goal game, which cannot even be called a farce.

However... Mashyana pays absolutely no attention to such differences.

She deflects the approaching bullet with an elegant sweep of her fan, but her face expresses seriousness. There is not an ounce of pride or frustration in her face: all her strength is devoted to responding to her older, younger brother. It is as if she believes that even after all this time, even if their positions and their very way of life have changed, and the difference in their strength has grown many times over, in fact they themselves have not changed at all. It is as if they were offering a prayer that they would not tolerate change.

In fact, a cannon shot would only cause her to have a fit of laughter. A gun is a weapon that can only boast efficiency and ease of use. On the one hand, anyone can fight with it, but on the other hand, whoever fights with it does not change its power.

The caliber, the type of projectile or gunpowder. It's the little things like that that determine the outcome: the difference between the shooters comes down to marksmanship at best. Whether a child or a great warrior, as soon as they hold a gun in their hands, the difference between them is minimized.

This is what makes it so handy, yet in terms of potential it is merely an extremely innocuous toy. The instrument, by its very design, designed for the common man, simply cannot affect the king of evil, and she didn't have to reflect it on purpose-she could have easily exhaled it on its own.

No, she did not even have to look in his direction. Yet Mashyana responded to every attack, even if they couldn't be called childish pranks.

A second shot, a third, the whole succession of bullets is reflected by smooth movements, reminiscent of a dance. Paradoxically, the thoroughness that forbids her to ignore any action turned in her direction, no matter what order it may be, proves that she is literally screaming to be noticed.

Incest's words turned out to be pure truth.

Mashyana's commandment is indeed a veritable mirror. In exchange for being obligated to respond to all the feelings addressed to her, she is allowed to repel enemy attacks with the same force.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Hate for hate, blow for blow.

A bullet for a bullet.

Nevertheless, this cannot be called a flawless shield protecting her in all circumstances. Everything is built on the fact that the loneliness of the attention-hungry Mashyana is so heavy that her demands on others' loyalty and sincerity are extremely high.

If the feelings addressed to her do not reach an almost insane attraction, as if all the world were looking at her alone, she cannot respond to them in their entirety. Because of this, she can only use standard means against those who do not fulfill this condition.

To put it simply, she can't stand cheaters. Especially the careless types who jump into fights for no particular reason, and the renegades who are obsessed with another great cause. All those

who see in Mashyana only a means or an intermediate stop are true adulterers, and it is difficult to call them the unrepeatable half.

They don't look directly at her, which means there's no need to respond to them properly. That's why she hasn't used the perfect reflection against the other Evil Kings or Quinn: Because of the extremely strict conditions, this power is very difficult to use when she wants to.

However, when all conditions are met, her defense is literally flawless. There is a perfect fusion of defense and offense.

There is only you and me in the world. We see no one but each other, and we desire no one else.

Only under such conditions, which means right now...

A pair dance spawned only to fall with the man you love, a Commandment designed solely to fight Zurvan.

- Fine, I feel your intention.

Do not turn away, and I will not turn away from thee. Let us go together to the very edge of heaven...

Whatsoever is turned upon her, she responds with an exact copy.

Because this reflection is "perfect," she cannot put forth more effort than was put into the attack on her. The response to a formidable enemy will be equally formidable; to an unsightly one, it will be unsightly. The peculiarities of the embodied essence of the mirror make this strategy rather full of flaws.

Normally, the Immobility of Impurities could shatter an entire planet with a single swing of its branch. The way it diligently reflects bullets looks excessively ridiculous, even pathetic.

But even so, so what? Mashyana declares to the world that she sees no problem with it.

She only dreamed of a date with Zurvan. Not about ruling the planets, not about the throne of the strongest, and not even about exterminating the good. The meaning of her birth in this unjust world is that she is not alone in this universe of eternal conflict - she only needs to believe in this. That alone overwhelms her.

She exists, here and now. Standing, clearly recognizable to another.

- My life blooms within you, never fading or disappearing.

Ah, so let us blossom in lush beauty. Is there any greater happiness in the world?!

- ...Clearly, indeed, a true mirror.

The thirteenth shot. Zurvan, who has emptied the whole store, whispers under his breath with a note of amazement. Of course, Mashyana is unharmed, but the same is true of him.

His own bullets reflected back at him. At the same speed and trajectory. He is not so stupid as not to dodge them, which means that such an outcome was inevitable. It's sad that his attack went nowhere, but on the other hand, the fact that the king of evil's response came down to just that plays into his hands.

However, given the difference in their physical strength, it is obvious who will give weakness first. Indeed, if he cannot find a way to break through Mashyana's defenses, no amount of Zurvan's efforts will save him.

He must realize that, too, and that is why he changes tactics.

- Sorry, I was just trying something. No matter how reliable a source, I don't really trust anything I can't verify myself.

In response to his older brother's flippant words, Mashyana twitches an eyebrow.

- You mean you succumbed to learning my Commandment?

- No, I really am a wuss, though you could really call that a trick. I'm not teasing you at all, I just have a few things prepared to face you.

In spite of his words, Zurvan does not reload his gun. Only without much sense, he spins the empty gun.

- What, you don't believe me?

- No, I do. I suppose you don't reload it precisely because you've realized how useless bullets are. The important thing is that your very soul declares that it will beat me.
- Or maybe I'm just going to run away.
- That's impossible.

As if cutting off any argument, Mashyana shakes her head stubbornly. Her rosy eyes burn with a feeling too lofty to be called ordinary trust.

- Leave your jokes to others. I became myself only for you, only in anticipation of this day. That means you have something in store for me alone. It cannot be otherwise.

The words sound like a threat, but they also sound like a petition... while the wind echoes through the sanctuary of uncleanness.

Ever since the day they were separated against their will, they have waited for the inevitable reunion, and thus have lived to see this hour. Mashyana firmly believes that she alone simply could not gain the limited and calculated power of her partner.

Zurvan smirks slightly. Somewhat awkwardly, but at the same time gently, he suddenly tosses his perpetual wide-brimmed hat high into the air and happily declares:

- All right, then, let's go!

The cannon shot that rang out for a moment was nothing like the previous ones. To begin with, the magazine should still be empty, and there could be no exploding powder or bullet that flew out.

However, the sound still rang out. Piercing... No, piercing the air - the sound of a thousand panes of glass shattering in an instant sounds like the very rule of creation breaking.

The invisible bullet that flew through the soaring hat. The projectile, resembling a beam of light, Mashyana meets, putting a fan forward. Whatever trick he employs, her providence remains a motionless mirror, capable of reflecting anything and everything. It cannot pierce it, or even prick it.

- ...Huh?!

This time, however, the perfect reflection gives way. Mashyana may have escaped the wound, but still takes a step back because she was unable to fully reflect Zurvan's beam. As she struggles to regain her footing, a look of amazement crosses her graceful face.

- What is this...

A veritable paradox. She thought the two undeniable forces would extinguish each other, but at the last moment she realizes they don't. His attack works differently.

Zurvan always goes against the current. He does everything in his own way, always contradicts everyone and stays on his own mind, and it is in this insolence that his true advantage lies. A simple-minded "ability to pierce anything" would rather be the first thing he'd ridicule.

But then, what's the point?

Mashyana's second and third shots that follow also struggle to reflect, but it still can't be called a proper reflection. The principle still eludes her: it's as if Zurvan is smashing someone else's Commandments...

A kind of neutralization. What is the right way to describe it?

Mashyana asks this question in a rush, until with a shudder she finds the answer.

- Haven't you taken any Commandment?

Unlike the average commoner, who is not familiar with the concept at all...

Or from the former way of life of the two of them, when they had enough of what they had and didn't need it.

- You know the Avesta, you know the injustice of the world, but you still reject power? You don't want to be constrained by anyone and have made it a rule to live outside all rules, Zurvan?!

This cannot even be called a deviation from the norm - it refutes the very principle that underlies it.



Whether one is a Yazata or a Daeva, anyone who comprehends Avesta deeply enough accepts the Commandment. Even if it happens to everyone in due course, this universe is not so good that one can remain indifferent to the acquisition of power forever.

Otherwise, you feel empty, as if you were just a puppet all your life. To find peace from questions about the meaning of the endless battle between black and white, or about the reason for one's own existence, a conviction capable of becoming a point of reference is essential.

Without the ability to declare who you are and to carve your own pride into creation itself, no one could even stand upright.

Yet right here is a man who thinks the Commandment is a curse for that very reason.

- Isn't it funny how the fetters of no fetters resemble some sort of sophism? Very much in my spirit. But most importantly, the reward is to my liking.

In Zurvan quietly discussing his mystery, you don't see a drop of cold calculation. Not because for the most part he has already been revealed, but only as a sign of sincerity of feeling for Mashyana - simply put, he speaks because she wants to hear it.

I have to assume he's not particularly interested in who comes out the winner of this battle, either.

- Not that I am specifically counting on it, but as you can see, the Commandments do not work on me. Neither does the power of myself, the power of the star spirits, the nature of the murderers-all the tricks of the good-for-nothing world against me don't make any sense.

- ...Look how you talk. It can't be that wide of a field.

- Quiet, let the older man show off a little.

Zurvan responds to Mashyana's remark with a disappointed sigh. A faithful confirmation that she has guessed.

The power received as a reward for her oath not to obey the law of creation will neutralize any trick based on that rule. If one takes this description literally, such a joker is practically invincible, but he really hasn't reached such unattainable heights at all.

Rather, he has a condition of increasing effectiveness. The reason for Zurvan's unique conviction lies in a bitter mistake he made thirteen years ago. In the memory of the lie he told.

He regrets hiding his true feelings when defeated at the hands of Mashyana. Therefore, his ability only shows its true potential before his older, younger sister. Against other opponents and in other scenarios, the most he can count on is the occasional weakening of his opponent.

- Basically, it works like this. What do we do now? Do we keep fighting, or do we stop? I don't think it makes much difference.

Rubbing his pistol on his temple, Zurvan implicitly suggests surrender. Now they have literally switched roles.

Though their powers are calculated on each other, no amount of effort will save Mashyana before the destruction of the foundations in the form of neutralization. Bound by the Oath of the Mirror, she would continue to fight if it were Zurvan's will, and if he told her to stop, she would have no choice but to obey.

Perhaps his main purpose was to confront Mashyana with this fact and impose a truce, but...

- Imposing a choice on me? That's funny.

The older, younger sister laughs to herself. Not because she can't find a way out of this situation: you can see an inexplicable sense of superiority in her brutally fragrant elegance.

- Yes, you are right, victory and defeat I do not care. However, obedient obedience to your words is not to my liking.

- So you can't spit on it after all?

- Perhaps. In that case, let me answer you equally again. I will leave the choice to you.

With these words, Mashyana raises her right hand to her face. On her white, elegant ring finger, a swirling ring gleams.

- Surrender or death?

- Hey, stop it, don't you get it?

It's Mashyagh - Zurvan realizes this and shakes her head irritably.

- I told you, it's not going to work on me right now. I don't know what kind of nonsense you want him to say, but it doesn't make sense.

- You're the one who doesn't understand.

Mashyana's smile, however, only gets more enchanting. She looks at her older brother with almost a mother's love.



- I suppose you jumped to conclusions and mistook him for a wishbone... Well, in a way, you got it right. It's based on a fervent prayer, a frantic cry of the soul. He does need strong emotions, but if you think he makes any dream come true, you're wrong.

The cherry-blossom-clad woman speaks, and her quiet words gradually fill with fervor. She explains that Mashyagh's deeds follow a clear and concrete logic, and that he himself is designed for one use only.

- He creates copies. In essence, a pair, identical but at the same time different, like the original male and female... Like you and me...

- ...what?

Zurvan's instincts cannot be fooled. At that moment, he realizes exactly what kind of creature he is.

He is the copy created by the artifact to match Mashyana. That is why he is in such a close relationship with his original, because it is as if fate itself commands them to strive for each other, to fight with each other.

Indeed, if he thinks about it, he can think of plenty of cases that confirm this. That is why this truth is indifferent to him.

Whatever the circumstances of his birth, his present position is unshakable. The fact that he is in fact the grandson of the Destruction Workshop changes nothing.

That's why he's thinking about something else entirely. If that's what Mashyagh is really for, then the rejuvenation of Magsarion is inexplicable.

As far as he knows, no one in the Air Burial Zone has ever been rejuvenated.

- I see what you're asking. But alas, I don't know the answer either.

Mashyana continues, for the question is now irrelevant.

- From the beginning to the end, it's just the two of us. Look at me, look at me. You alone are enough for me. Let only you look at me.

With a hum, like the kindling of the fire of life in the primordial ocean, the Mashyagh begins to shimmer.

Something capable of absorbing its master's will and creating the desired pairing is not at all limited to the creation of matter.

The target can be a phenomenon, an idea - anything that is regarded as "existing. So it goes without saying that Zurvan's beliefs are no exception.

- Let's try to reproduce your destruction of foundations. I wonder what will come of it? Will I be able to live with it? Or will it ruin me? I suspect the odds are not in my favor, but I don't care what the outcome is.

The question of victory and defeat is too vulgar-as long as we are close, I am happy.

Say, you're looking at me, aren't you, Zurvan?

- Stop...!

The man rushes out of his seat while the woman closes her eyes. Their feelings and destinies find themselves consumed by the flaring light that lifts the foul petals into the air.

Will they fall? Will they bloom? Or will they vanish?

There is only chaos ahead, and no one can predict what will happen next.